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THE MAN FROM SAN LOPEZ FIXED HIS GAZE UPON THE HAND. IT WAS WHITE,
WELL SHAPED AND BEAUTIFUL.

OR, THE SEVEN SECRETS.

A Romance of the Demon Doctor
of Gotham.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN COLDGRIP" NOVELS,
"HERCULES GOLDSBUR," "SUNSHINE
SAM," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. QUICKSILVER DAN.

A BITING March wind was blowing in from
from the bay and was whirling little flakes of
snow into the faces of the pedestrians of the
streets of New York.

The day, which had been disagreeable, was near-
ing its close, and in a short time the thousand
and one lights of the great city would again
leap forth. Men and women bent their heads
to the keen blast and the closely buttoned
guardians of the metropolis sought shelter from
its fury.

Against the wind a man was walking rapidly,

as though he had to be out at that hour and was anxious to reach a certain place within a given time.

"I had almost forgotten Mrs. Harlow and her child," said the man to himself. "I have not seen them since I rescued the little girl from the wheels of the beer truck, and I am at a loss to know why the mother should send for me in such haste and mystery."

The speaker turned into one of the back streets of the city and after another walk of a few minutes reached a house, into the half-opened hallway of which he plunged and was lost to view.

The house was a five story affair, old and somewhat rickety—one of those tenement structures which one sees in every city where there are poor and wretched people.

The man found himself in a dark hall, but not dark enough to hide a flight of steps to which he sprang at once and began to ascend.

Reaching the third landing, he turned aside and rapped on a door to be answered by the barking of a dog beyond, and the next moment the door was opened.

"Come in. I have been looking for you," said a woman's voice, and when the man had entered, the door was reclosed.

Then, in the light of a small lamp which revealed a cramped room inhabited by a woman of middle life and a little girl whose face resembled the older one, the man threw off his coat for the room was hot and close.

He stood revealed as a youngish person with a bright eye and a face smoothly shaven. His figure was well-knit and seemingly very strong, but his hand was white and as soft as a maiden's—softer than that of the woman who stood at the table looking at him with mingled joy and fear.

"Tressy said you would come," said this woman. "I am glad she found you at home. I was afraid you had forgotten us and that you would not recall your last words the day you brought Tressy up-stairs after her adventure in the street. You told us then, as you remember, that if ever we needed you, we should not hesitate to send for you."

"I have not forgotten," smiled the man, looking around the room as though wondering upon what service he had been called to the tenement. "I remember Tressy quite well."

Before she spoke again the woman, Tressy's mother, crossed the room and carefully scrutinized the door, when, seeing that it was shut, she came back and stopped close to the man who had taken a chair.

"I'm afraid something's happened to the man on the next floor above us," she went on, suddenly lowering her voice. "You don't know him, I suppose? Well, he has been living in the room for more than a year, and, so far as we know, has no acquaintances—at least he never brings any one home with him."

"But he must have had a visitor last night," put in the child, who was not more than twelve, looking up as she spoke from her task of coloring feathers for one of the dealers in millinery goods who employ child labor.

"Let me tell him, Tressy," said the mother, quickly silencing the child, who dropped her eyes and went back to her work. "Yes, we think the man above us had a caller, but we may not be right. Last night, at twelve, we heard a soft step come down the stairs. I happened to be near the door at the time, and Tressy, who was up and at work, heard it, too. Now, the person whose step we heard may have been somewhere else than in the room of our neighbor, but, somehow or other, I can not help thinking that he was there and no place else. Why do I think so?"

She stopped for a second and glanced again at the child.

In an instant the little fingers ceased to toil, and the child left the table.

"I'll run down to Mrs. Moony's a bit," said Tressy, and in a minute the woman and man were the only occupants of the room.

"There are some things I don't want her to hear," continued the former, nodding toward the door which Tressy had softly closed. "She's young yet. Jack Bromley, our upper neighbor, has had a visitor on several occasions within the past month. I met her once on the landing myself, and frightened her almost out of her wits."

"Oh, the visitor was a woman, eh?"

"Yes. She never came after that that I know of, barring the step we heard last night, if it was hers. I want you to see what is the matter with Jack Bromley, and that is why I sent for you. I wouldn't enter his room for the world, because he once told me that he didn't like Tressy and I, and I can't imagine why, because we've never set one stone in his path."

"Who is Jack Bromley?" asked the listener.

"That's a puzzle, and one we can't solve. He took the room months ago and seldom left it. He inhabited it like a hermit, and, as he didn't work, though he seemed to have all the money he wanted, he wouldn't make friends. Sometimes we would not hear him for days; at other times he would fill the whole house with rollicking songs of wild life, as though he had been to the mines and made a stake there."

"Is he an old man?"

"Not past forty, if that," was the reply. "I am so firmly convinced that the soft footstep which came down the stair last night—mind you, we didn't hear it go up—has something to do with the silence that has filled Jack Bromley's room all day. We haven't heard him move at all since."

The man, who had listened attentively to all the woman had said, left his chair.

"I ought to tell you all," continued Mrs. Nancy Harlow. "Tressy went up to his door twice to-day and listened there awhile, but not a sound paid her for her trouble."

"Jack Bromley may have gone off."

"I don't think so, sir."

"Well, we shall soon see," smiled the man, and in a moment he was in the hall beyond the room climbing the steps leading to the next landing.

"The first door to the left on the next floor," was the last information obtained from Mrs. Harlow, and the man went straight to it.

He made as little noise as possible, reached the portal without meeting any one, and rapped lightly thereon.

There was no answer to his raps.

For a moment he stood there with a half smile on his smooth face, then he grasped the knob and turned it. To his astonishment the door yielded.

The detective—the man was Sol Sphinx, one of the keenest shadows of Gotham—opened the door and went in. The room ahead was dark and still. It had the appearance of a room untenant by any one, but the sharp eyes of the man saw something that would have escaped the observation of less penetrating orbs.

The poor light which came in at the only window showed him the form of a man lying on the floor.

Sol Sphinx stepped forward, but not without having shut the door behind him.

He bent over the body and placed a hand on the cold face.

"Mrs. Harlow was right. Something has happened to Jack Bromley, if this is he," he muttered.

The detective took from an inner pocket a small tin box which opened when a spring was touched, and struck a light, the little flame of which leaped up and revealed the body on the floor and its surroundings.

The stranger had been dead a long time. The body was stiff and half drawn up on the floor, as though the man had struggled for life on the hard boards. The face was covered with a darkish beard, and there was nothing about it to say that its possessor had ever been even good-looking.

Sol Sphinx, used to such things, began to search the man's clothes, turning his pockets wrong side out. He found nothing for all his trouble, when he extended his hunt around the cramped room. He seemed to suspect a dark crime and wanted a clew to the murdering hand.

All at once he stooped and looked toward the door by which he had entered the room. He was almost sure he had heard some one on the outside, and thought that perhaps Mrs. Harlow had found courage enough to come to the portal.

But the door did not open, and the detective resumed his search.

Jack Bromley had been the holder of but a very small portion of this world's goods. Two chairs, a rickety table, a poor bed, and a box in one corner, completed his possessions.

There was nothing among these for the detective.

"If it is murder, and the case falls into the hands of Nick Turbot, I may see him rake in another triumph, and he sha'n't do that if I can prevent," decided Sol Sphinx. "This is my case, and I don't like to give it up without a clew."

Once more he returned to the man dead on the floor.

He had never heard of Jack Bromley. In all probability there would be no reward in the case, saying that a crime had been committed, and, as yet, he had no actual proof of one.

The detective re-searched the dead man's clothes.

Suddenly his hand felt something under the lining of the left lapel of the dark coat the body wore.

He set his little lamp on the floor and took out his knife. In a moment he had ripped open the lapel and pulled into view a small, crumpled and dirty piece of paper which, seemingly, had nestled there for years.

Bending down, he unfolded the paper and examined it by the light.

If it revealed anything important, he did not betray it by word or look, but quietly placed the paper in his pocket and looked once more at the dead.

At this moment the same sound he had heard before, again greeted his ears.

It was as the door, as before.

Sol Sphinx rose quickly and stepped across the room. He laid his hand on the knob, and, after a second's silence, jerked the door open.

But he was not rewarded for his caution. There was no one at the threshold, and he did not hear the sound of flying feet.

A puzzled expression came instantly over the face of the detective.

He stood for a moment in the doorway, then blew out his lamp and restored it to his pocket.

"I heard some one breathe here," he muttered. "I would swear that some person came to this door while I was searching the room. If Mrs. Harlow, she must have the power of transforming herself into a viewless person at will."

He went back to the widow's room. Entering it, he found the woman standing at the table, a question on her face and fear and wonderment intermingled in her eyes.

"Why didn't you come in?" said the detective.

Mrs. Harlow lost color.

"What do you mean? I haven't stirred from this room since you went out."

There was honesty in voice and face, and the detective continued:

"Did you hear anything?"

"I heard you walking about in the room above," was the reply.

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

"Do the steps always creak when any one uses them?"

"Most always; but I remember that they did not creak when the soft footsteps came down them last night."

Sol Sphinx said nothing more for a moment.

"I found Jack Bromley in his room," he said when he spoke again.

"Dead, of course?" cried Mrs. Harlow.

"Dead!"

"I've feared so. I don't know what you think, and I haven't seen him, but I tell you that he was killed by the person whose soft steps we heard on the stairs. Was it an awful sight?"

"Not to me," smiled Sol. "I couldn't find a wound on the body, though the coroner may do better."

Mrs. Harlow drew back with a sign of aversion.

"Must I be dragged to the inquest?" she asked.

"They may want you to tell what you know about Quicksilver Dan."

"Who's Quicksilver Dan?" exclaimed the woman.

"Why, the dead man in the room overhead; but tell all you know about him as Jack Bromley."

"He had two names, then?"

"Yes. To me the man who died last night was Quicksilver Dan."

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN FROM SAN LOPEZ.

SOL SPHINX once more buttoned his coat tightly about his well-rounded figure and plunged down the stairs of the tall tenement and into the night.

The lamps were all lighted now, and he had no difficulty in picking his way along the street.

Once or twice perhaps he felt his bosom to see if he had still the bit of paper he had taken from its concealment in the lapel of the dead man's coat, and satisfying himself that it was yet in his possession, he seemed to quicken his gait, as though eager to reach his snug lodgings on a narrow street near Broadway.

The detective found a warm room when he opened the door and threw off his hat. There was a movement of something that looked human on a cot in one corner, and Sol looked at it a moment.

"Has any one been here?" he asked.

The one addressed roused and showed that it was a man—a man with a curious face which would have been a study anywhere, for its face was long and narrow, as though it had been stretched at one time out of its natural proportions; the eyes were deeply sunken, and had a peculiar glitter for eyes of gray. It would have been difficult to have told the age of the man by looking at him; he was doubtless younger than he appeared.

"Some one was here," answered this man, in a shrill voice.

"Well?"

"He came in a like storm and asked if a detective held the fort. I told him one did and that if he wanted to wait you'd be back soon."

"But he wouldn't wait, Jilt?"

"No. He looked at me as if he would like to strangle me, and growling something I could not understand, took himself off, and I was glad he did so. I wouldn't have had him wait for all the world."

"What was he like?"

"He was tall, dark-skinned and talked like a man who hadn't been here long. He reminded me of that Californian you had for a client last summer."

"Oh, he appeared like a Westerner, did he?"

"Exactly. He didn't just say he would call again, but I think he will, for he appeared very anxious to see you."

Jilt, as though not expected to convey further information, went back to his cot, upon which he curled himself like a dog and was snoring almost at once.

The detective sat down at the oval table standing in the center of the room and took the bit of discolored paper from his pocket.

He unfolded it with the greatest care and spread it before him.

It was dark hued and greasy as well as full of creases, for it had been crumpled up under the lining of the lapel, and it cost the shadow some care to straighten it out. When that was done he bent over the paper, looking at the lines now visible upon it in spots.

"I was right," he muttered. "The man I found dead over Nancy Harlow's rooms was Quicksilver Dan, and I think I can read all that is on the paper. Let me see."

The next moment he was reading half aloud as his keen eyes ran over the greasy message:—

"If I am found dead, by murder or otherwise, I want the finders to know that I am not Jack Bromley, but Quicksilver Dan. Beyond this I don't think any one will have a right to go, as I haven't been of such great account to this world. I am in danger of being killed every day of my life, and all because I hold a certain secret which they want silenced forever. This is all."

"July 10th, 1882."

The Gotham detective was quite sure he had mastered all the contents of the paper, and was folding it as carefully as he had opened it, when he was disturbed by the opening of the door directly in front of him.

He looked up and across the table.

"That's the man, Master Sphinx!" came from Jilt's corner, and a glance at the occupant of the cot showed the half-erect figure of the little man, and the long arm which covered the man in the doorway like a six-shooter.

"If I'm the man, I guess I don't have to be introduced," said the detective's visitor coming in with a heavy tread. "That thing on the cot has performed that service," and he cast a glowering look upon Jilt who subsided as though to finish his nap, but really to watch like a weasel.

Sol Sphinx could not help looking at the broad shoulders and fine figure of his visitor. He was almost massive, and his yellowish beard shone like strands of gold in the mellow light of the gas; his brown pantaloons were thrust into the tops of his boots, in Western style, and the hands were dark, but dangerously silken in looks.

"Sol Sphinx, eh?" queried this personage, halting at the table and looking down upon the detective.

"I am Sol Sphinx."

At the same time Jilt received a mysterious hint to quit the room, and crawling from his cot and shooting a farewell look of distrust at the stranger, vanished, to comfort himself at the bar of a neighboring saloon.

"I'm from San Lopez," continued the detective's caller, running his left hand through his ample beard. "I don't know this infernal city like I do Arizony, but if I war here awhile I guess I'd get the hang of its trails. I called awhile ago, but found no one here but the baboon what just moseyed off, and of course I had no business with him. You know pretty nearly everybody, eh?"

Sol hastened to assure his caller that there were in New York thousands upon thousands of people of whose existence he was entirely ignorant.

"But that ain't exactly what I meant," declared the Man from San Lopez. "I mean that you are compelled to know a good many people who don't just live as they should—strangers who drop into the city and lose themselves to their friends."

"Oh, missing people, eh?"

"Yes, though I doubt not there ar' some you never see at all, for this is an almighty big place, an' it seems to me one could hide here a thousand years and never be heard tell of. Now, to go a mite further, I'm Morte, of San Lopez, the once owner of the Rattlesnake Bonanza, a golden giant in its prime, but now not of much account, owing to a woman who wrecked me and my partner and sent the mine to the devil; yes, a woman, I say."

He spoke with intense bitterness, and the dark hand which rested upon the edge of the table tightened, while the darker veins in it sunk suddenly out of sight.

"I want to find 'em," he went on. "I want to strike their trail, for I know that one of 'em is here, and whar one is the other one must be. I want to unearth 'em."

Once more he ran his hand through his yellow beard, and then left his chair.

"I've got enough to make you independent for life," he announced. "Find the trail for me and you won't have to sit here waiting for customers, or for flies like a spider at the door of her den. The she-devil did her work years ago, but I've recruited up somewhat since, and have made another stake, though not as big a one as the old mine."

"If the trail is years old it may be hard to follow," suggested Sol Sphinx.

"That's your business; but you won't have to hunt alone. I'll be hunting all the time myself. I'm on this trail to grip throats an' blast somebody's game. I'm the Man from San Lopez, and that city's reputation for coolness was known all over the West. But I haven't told you who they are."

He dropped back into the chair again and

drummed on the table with the tips of his sleek brown fingers.

"We'll begin with the serpent first," he resumed. "Five years ago she was the Queen of San Lopez. She ran nearly everything there. She dipped into mining, could las-o, shoot and love—yes, and at the last named sport she out-did herself. She married my partner. With the hull camp crazy after her, she took him over all and then set out to wreck us both. We called her Medea, though that wasn't her real name of course. No one ever knew what it was, but, that's neither here nor there in my story. Queen Medea one day left the country. She mounted the stage with a six-shooter in her hand, and rode off with the load to the nearest station of the Southern Pacific, and thar the trail ended."

The Man from San Lopez stopped as though he was very dry and it was a good point for a drink to come in, but, as none was forthcoming, he went on.

"When I came to look into matters and things, I discovered that the mine was wrecked—that Medea and my partner had finished it up. I was almost dead broke, for, believing that the Rattlesnake was always to be a golden-egg'd goose, I patronized Cactus Charley's game, and was wont to fall back on the mine for more dust. I had a notion to kill my partner in his boots, but hadn't the heart to do it after his confession, in which he laid all the blame upon her, and I pulled up and went off. For four years I did not see San Lopez. When I went back I was on my feet again. I found that my partner had departed, but that a letter had come and had been kept nearly three long years for me by Cactus Charley."

The hand of Morte dived into his inner pocket and a letter fell upon the table before the detective.

"That's it," said the man. "You see it's post-marked New York. It was written by my partner, not as neatly as a clerk would do it, for he warn't no scholar. He don't say much in the letter—he wrote merely to say that he thought he would soon have enough to pay me back my stolen share. Look at it."

The letter was pushed toward Sol Sphinx who took it up and drew a half sheet of dirty and worn paper from the envelope.

He looked at the scrawl a moment and then at the Man from San Lopez.

"Did your runaway partner write this letter?" he asked.

"He did. You don't admire the scratchin', eh?"

"No, but I have something to show you," and the detective drew forth the dirty scrap he had put up upon Morte's entering the room.

"Your eyes are good," continued the city shadow, placing the scrap and the letter side by side and shoving them toward his caller. "Tell me who penned the piece I am showing you."

The Man from San Lopez leaned over the table and scrutinized the paper taken from the dead.

His eyes seemed to devour it.

"He wrote it!" he cried. "Don't I remember the crooks in his letters, for he used to keep our accounts. Where did you get that bit o' paper?"

"It came into my possession to-night," was the reply. "But you haven't read it?"

"No. It looks as though it had been carried in the corner of a pocket, for it is greasy, and the letters are nearly blotted out. What does it say?"

Slowly Sol Sphinx read the message of the dead, Morte of Arizona drinking in every word and the color leaving his face until but little remained.

"It looks from that that my partner is dead," observed the Man from San Lopez, sadly.

"If his name was Quicksilver Dan, he is dead."

A long breath escaped the bearded lips of the man in front of the city detective.

"There was but one Quicksilver Dan and he was my pard," he said at last. "Where is he?"

His voice had suddenly become harsh, and emotional despite its harshness.

"If you will follow me I will show you the man who gave up the writing I have just shown you."

"Morte of Arizony is at your service. I see the old trail of the beautiful serpent of the mines!"

Eager to take the Man from San Lopez to the dead, lying on the floor of the tall tenement in the narrow street, Sol Sphinx picked up his hat and buttoned closely his coat once more. Eagerness as intense as his own blazed up in the eyes of the miner, and the twain were soon down on the streets with the wind blowing as it had blown since sundown.

The Man from San Lopez was silent now. His tall figure was a target for many eyes that noticed it under the lamps, for the contrast between it and the detective's was great.

The two men reached the house without accident and plunged into the dark hall.

Sol Sphinx led the way to the fatal room.

"He's in here," announced the spotter, opening the door and striking his light at the same time.

He went in with the Man from San Lopez at his heels.

"In here, eh?" echoed the giant from Arizona. "I don't see anything that looks like Quicksilver Dan."

There was no response, for Sol Sphinx, the Ferret Detective, was staring at the spot where he had last seen the tenant of the little room.

It was vacant now.

The body of Quicksilver Dan had disappeared!

CHAPTER III.

THE ENTRAPPED GIANT.

THE day that followed the foregoing events was cold and blustery, like its predecessor.

The middle of the afternoon found the Man from San Lopez seated in the little room where he had taken lodgings. He was quite alone and the countenance he exhibited to the fire that glowed in the grate before him told that the effects of the night's adventures had not left him.

"It's devilish queer," he was saying to himself. "Thar's no doubt that the Sphinx detective found Quicksilver Dan dead in that room, nor that he left the corpse on the floor when he went off. But I didn't see it when he took me thar to identify it. No, sir, it was gone and thar wasn't a trace o' whar it went. The lady and her little girl heard no steps on the stairs after Mr. Sphinx went off and thar's whar the mystery comes in. It beats my time all holler; never saw anything of the kind at San Lopez. It beats the detective, too—any man kin see that. He went home all tore up over the matter, and though he didn't say much—I don't think he's one of the saying kind—he was worried over the case."

He paused and passed one of his yellow hands through his golden beard.

"It's queer that I should hear of Dan's death here in New York the very night I call on the man-hunter to enlist his services in the hunt before me," he went on. "So Dan had changed his name—was Jack Bromley to those who were acquainted with him, and lived like a hermit in that tall house, as though he was trying to keep away from somebody. Yet the lady—Mrs. Harlow—says she sometimes saw a veiled woman going up the stairs towards Dan's den. Is Medea here, too? Did she know that Dan was in the city living in that way, and had she hired him to keep out of the way? If she's here she's playing a game of some kind—one in which she don't want any interference, for that's just her style. What would she do if she knew I was here?"

A light chuckle followed this query which the Man from San Lopez did not attempt to answer, but played once more with his tawny beard and was for some time silent.

"By George! thar's no telling what she wouldn't do," he said at last, but not in a very cheerful tone. "Let's see. She's been gone from San Lopez nearly five year and has had time to play a good many deep games with her infernal beauty and siren wiles. And she'd stoop to anything—that woman would. The death of Quicksilver Dan is proof enough of that, as I told Mr. Sphinx, for I firmly believe—"

Right here the Arizonian's reverie was disturbed by a rapping at the door, and he rose and crossed the room. He was installed on the second floor, but had heard no one come up the stairs.

When he opened the door, instead of seeing his landlady, he saw a boy who, looking at him with an inquisitive eye, fumbled a letter with a pair of tawny hands.

"I've got a letter for the big gentleman what boards here," said the urchin.

The Man from San Lopez was already stretching out his hand for the missive.

As though satisfied from what he saw, the boy dropped the letter into the hand and turning, disappeared down the steps two at a time and shot out of the house as though fired from a cannon.

"Must have thought I was going to kick him out," grinned Morte of Arizona, going back into the room with the letter between thumb and finger. "I guess this is from the detective, from what he said on parting last night."

He did not resume the chair, but stood erect and tore open the envelope.

A minute later he had read:

"MR. MORTIMER:—"

"I have discovered something new and want to see you. Please let the bearer of this guide you and he will conduct you to where we can talk without listeners. S. S."

The Man from San Lopez looked up with a scowl.

"Why didn't the young gopher stay if he was to conduct me to whar Sol Sphinx is?" he cried. "Here's a pretty go, for it's evident that I ain't to meet the detective at his office. Mebbe he don't want the baboon to hear."

Crushing the letter in his big hand, the Arizonian hurried from the room and went heavy-footed down the stairs.

Just beyond the lower door, shivering in the wind, he found the bearer of the message.

"Ah, here you are!" he exclaimed, seizing the boy by the collar as though to prevent his escape. "Don't you know your master told you to take me to him?"

The youngster grinned.

"I'm ready to go and the sooner we are off the better," continued Morte.

The boy made no reply, but started off.

"I don't think I told the detective last night that my whole name was Mortimer," mused the Man from San Lopez. "He must have guessed it from 'Morte.' These fellows are sharp as foxes, and this one ain't an exception."

The boy led the tall man up one street and down another; they nearly crossed the city a few squares above the Battery, and at last the little guide halted in front of a two-story brick house which had stood behind a pair of very old trees that moaned with their bare branches in the March wind.

"Is he in here?" asked the man, looking from the dismal house to the boy.

"D'ye think I'd bring yer to the wrong place?" was the gamin's retort. "If he ain't in thar whar d'ye think he is?"

Satisfied with this, the Man from San Lopez ran up the steps while the boy slipped away. The bell-pull was violently drawn two or three times, while he gave the outside of the house another hasty inspection.

He was destined to recall its appearance before he was many hours older.

The sound of the bell had not ceased when the door was opened by a woman, and the giant tipped his hat, but at the same time went in—the hat almost touching the ceiling, the corridor was so low, and the woman seeing this, said merrily that they didn't have giants for callers very often.

"Is he here?" asked the Man from San Lopez, taking for granted that the woman knew why he came.

"Your friend?" she said. "He will be here in a few minutes. You may be a little ahead of time, or something may have detained him. Step into the room on our right and amuse yourself till he comes."

She opened a door which revealed a small room, into which the Arizonian stepped, and the portal was closed.

There was a feeling of warmth in the apartment, though no fire was visible, and the place was dark though a tiny spark of gas stood ready to be increased by the human hand.

The tall figure of the Arizonian crossed the floor and threw on more light.

Glancing around as he did so, he discovered that he was in a little room scantily furnished.

A table stood in the center, and he went toward it with his eyes fastened upon a curious little heap of minerals there. A miner himself, these were the very things to interest him.

Halting at the table he took up one of the bits. The next second the floor seemed to give way beneath his feet, and though he sprang back with a cry, he stood on nothing; in fact, he was falling into an abyss!

The figure of the giant disappeared; the trap closed, and there was left in the room not a single trace of the victim.

The floor drop had scarcely closed ere a head appeared at the door, and a pair of glistening black eyes looked for a moment into the room.

As to the man himself, he had simply fallen into a dark receptacle beneath the floor, but he was not permitted to remain there.

He was half stunned by the fall, but roused himself quickly, on the alert.

"It's a trap!" he cried. "I wonder if the detective is in the game against me?"

He now felt the floor beneath him move again; but, this time, it did not sink as before.

On the contrary, it seemed to move forward and he soon found himself propelled onward by some strange and unseen machinery, while at the same time something like a pair of talons came up in the dark and fastened in his clothes, holding him securely to the board or moving car.

The movements of the car and the working of the talons quite took the miner's breath, and, he did not recover it until the car stopped, and he was unceremoniously dumped into the dark, while a certain sound seemed to tell him that the car had rolled back.

Unhindered now, he leaped to his feet and stood erect in the gloom as dark as the night of Styx.

"This is devilry without a rival!" cried the Arizonian. "The whole thing is a plot to put me out of the way. The hand of Queen Medea is in the game. I now know she is somewhere in New York. Well, that message would have caught a fox; no wonder it caught me."

He stopped and made his way to a wall which he found ahead in the dark.

It was almost smooth, with here and there seams as though made with a trowel. As high as he could reach he could feel these seams, and in a few minutes, having made the rounds of his prison, he was prepared to say that it was almost square, and apparently without a door.

The prisoner leaned against one of the stony sides and thought.

Every now and then his teeth, grating in anger, would break the grave-like silence of the place; but not a word came from his lips.

Once more he made the rounds of the dungeon.

He gave it an inspection more minute than the first one. Not an inch escaped him. His

fingers were now the only eyes he had, and he used them well.

The floor he trod was as hard as adamant and his feet sent out a sound that echoed dismally in the chamber.

All at once he fell back from a light which flashed suddenly, almost blinding him.

"Great Scott! a hand!" cried the Man from San Lopez, and he stood in the center of the dungeon, staring at a hand which seemingly was thrust through the solid wall and was applying a match to a burner set in the masonry.

It was an apparition calculated to startle the bravest and coolest headed.

As the match came in contact with the gas, a sudden flame burst, lighting up the whole interior of the dungeon, and throwing the tall shadow of the captive upon the wall behind him.

The Man from San Lopez fixed his gaze upon the hand. It was white, well-shaped and beautiful. There was a shining bracelet on the wrist, and a jewel glistened on one of the fingers.

It was the hand of a woman, evidently!

While he stared at it, it was withdrawn, the burnt match falling to the stony floor, and the wall where the hand had been seemed to become as solid as before.

"More mystery," fell from the prisoner's tongue. "This place has been prepared for me, and I have walked into the trap like a fool. But, that letter would have deceived any one, especially after what I saw and heard last night. Now that I have some light on the subject, I'll see how I'm held."

He could now make the rounds of his prison with some degree of satisfaction; it was no longer feeling in the dark.

The walls were cemented, with nothing to break the evenness but the seams he had discovered with his hands.

But all at once he came to a halt.

There were long marks in the floor at his feet. "The wheels of the infernal car that brought me in here!" he cried, stooping and examining the marks in the light of a friendly jet. "Yes, that is it exactly. The car went back this way, and it must have quitted the dungeon here."

He stood up and looked at the wall. Now he saw what had hitherto escaped his eyes. A door was set into the wall. The four seams which formed a long square told him this.

But the door seemed as solid as the wall itself.

The Man from San Lopez looked until his teeth grated and a mad curse came through them.

"Cooped up to die like a scorpion surrounded by fire!" he said. "Did I cross the continent on my vengeance hunt to get caught and caged almost before I had taken the first steps?"

A slight sound fell upon his ears and he looked toward the burning jet.

The jeweled hand was visible once more.

The wall had opened, as it were, and he was gazing at the hand of fate.

But now it did not hold a match, but instead of pointing toward the jet, was turned toward the ceiling above it, and the Man from San Lopez saw that it was writing on the lighted wall.

He did not move, as though the slightest stir on his part would break the tableau and cause the sudden vanishment of the hand.

He saw the dark letters form on the wall; he watched that moving hand, as though not to do so would be to sink dead where he stood.

The work of the white fingers did not last long. The hand suddenly stopped and then vanished, the wall closing behind it by magic.

Then, and not before, did the Man from San Lopez move.

He sprang across the cell and stared at the writing on the wall.

"DIE AS THE FOOL DIETH!"

That was what he read.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW TRAIL.

THE day of the Arizonian's misfortune had passed away and another night was come.

Jilt, the strange creature who slept in the detective's office, was curled up dog-like on the cot in the darkest corner of the room, but was not asleep.

His bright eyes were watching the door as though he expected to see it open and he was not disappointed. The nearest clock, one on Broadway, was striking seven when the door, swinging noiselessly, opened and admitted a man.

The detective's watch-dog saw the intruder from the very first, though he was not seen himself.

Jilt's thin figure seemed to take up no room at all, or else had the knack of drawing itself into nothing, for, though the man looked toward the corner, he seemed to believe that he was the sole occupant of the place.

Moving across the floor without noise, he reached the little oval table in the center of the office and seated himself there. The gas, burning low at the time of his entrance, he now turned a little higher which enabled the watchful Jilt to see that he was a man of, perhaps, forty with a well-knit figure, a darkish face partially covered with a soft brown beard, and gloved hands.

Jilt was certain he had never seen this man before, but was just as certain that he would know him again, no matter where he met him.

The man at the table took from his pocket a memorandum-book from which he tore a leaf and began to write thereon.

The eyes of Jilt eagerly followed the moving hand.

When the man finished his task he folded the writing, placed upon it a paper weight which he found on the table, and, taking another survey of the room, again without spying Jilt, arose and left the scene.

Jilt, springing up and leaping across the floor, heard him go down the steps to the side-walk, then ran back to the table and picked up the writing.

"Shall I?" he asked himself aloud, holding the paper in his hand. "It wasn't left for me, but Sol. Shall I look and see what the mysterious man left? He wasn't the same one that was here last night—the one who called me a baboon. This man was handsome and had white skin as soft as a woman's."

Jilt's curiosity got the best of him. He could not resist the temptation to read the letter left by the stranger, and opening it he read as follows:

"I would like to see you at the first opportunity. Call at my office and you will find me at any hour. Burn this for safety's sake, but don't forget that I have important business with you."

"DR. JALLIEN."

"Who's Doctor Jallien?" cried Jilt, looking up from the brief note. "There's a thousand doctors in this city and I'm not expected to know all of them. So that man was Doctor Jallien? He looked to me like a tiger dressed in velvet. I wish Sol could have seen him while he wrote at the table."

Jilt replaced the note just as he had found it and went back to his bed.

By and by he got up and went down upon the street, where he ran against a dark form standing in front of the building and apparently looking wistfully into the open hall-way.

The person thus struck muttered something which Jilt did not understand, and darted off before Sol Sphinx's watch-dog had a good view of him, and Jilt turned and walked into his favorite saloon, where he ordered his usual tippie and went to a table to drink it.

While thus engaged he suddenly recalled the collision on the sidewalk, and set down his glass half emptied.

"That fellow was watching the house," said Jilt. "I ran against him before he had an idea I was in the neighborhood. Maybe the office shouldn't be left unlocked with Doctor Jallien's note lying on the table. I don't like the looks of things."

He swallowed the rest of his tippie and bolted back to his room, but he was too late.

Dr. Jallien's note was not upon the table, though the paper weight apparently had not been disturbed. Some thief had purloined the note. Why not the person with whom he had collided?

For a moment Jilt was stunned by the catastrophe. Such a thing had never happened him before. He had watched Sol Sphinx's room with the vigilance of a Cerberus, and nothing had ever been stolen.

He was busy with his thoughts, which were not pleasant ones, when he started at a footstep on the stairs.

"It is Sol!" cried Jilt, turning pale. "But I shall tell him all. Maybe he can catch the scoundrel," and then, turning, he found himself face to face with Sol Sphinx, who seemed surprised to see him in the middle of the room and not upon the cot.

Jilt began his story at once, but the detective soon interrupted him.

"Who left the note? Whose name was signed to it?" he asked.

Jilt had to make an unpleasant confession. He confessed that his curiosity had overpowered him, and that he had read it. It was from "Dr. Jallien," and he wanted to see the detective as soon as possible.

Sol Sphinx seemed to start at mention of the doctor's name.

"If any more thieves come, hold them," he said to Jilt, with a smile. "I will not be gone long."

And leaving the strange creature alone, resolved to choke the life out of the first stranger who entered the room, the detective departed.

"From Doctor Jallien, eh?" mused Sol Sphinx, while he walked under the lamps. "If I am not mistaken, the very man I want to meet, though not probably on the same business he has with me. I have lost the Man from San Lopez, who may be hunting for himself on strange and dangerous trails, but I wouldn't miss seeing this Doctor Jallien for the world."

Sol Sphinx's walk through the almost deserted streets of the city was a long one, but it ended at last.

He drew up in front of a prominent house, alongside the front door of which swung a sign bearing the legend:

"DOCTOR JALLIEN,

PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON."

A bell was handy and the detective rung it at once.

In a moment the door opened and a man who had the same eyes of the person watched hawk-like by Jilt, appeared to view.

"Always on time," said the man, looking into the detective's face, and Sol was escorted into a cozy office, the blinds of which were down.

"You got the note I left for you?" continued the doctor.

"Yes," answered Sol.

"No one was at home when I called, and I had to leave it on your table. We will come to business at once. As you may know, I am Mr. Parke Newport's family physician. I have been doctoring his daughter, who is in a bad way; but I have been suddenly deprived of my patient."

"Is she dead?" asked the detective.

"No, sir; she has disappeared."

"What, the child of such a prominent man as Parke Newport?"

"Even so."

"We have heard nothing of this."

"Perhaps not. Newport himself, as you may also know, is not in the city at this time, and his wife has hesitated to spread the disappearance abroad, not wanting any undue publicity, and for fear of affecting her husband, who is subject to heart failure."

The detective nodded.

"Mrs. Newport has concluded to put this case into the hands of a first-class detective, and your name came naturally to her mind. The case is simply this: Yesterday evening, at six o'clock, a boy brought Miss Pearl a note, and shortly afterward she left the house, saying that she was going to the corner drug-store to get some stamps. Her maid offered to perform this service for her, but was repulsed, though not rudely, and that was the last seen of the young lady. We have been unable to get the slightest clew, and Mrs. Newport cannot give you any more information than I have in my own power, which is very little. It's a strange case—to us, at least, though it may not be so to you whose duty it is to look up similar ones."

Sol Sphinx was silent for a moment.

He knew that the dark and penetrating eyes of Dr. Jallien were fastened upon him.

There was some French blood in this man's veins. He had come to New York years before the opening of our story, and had been mixed up, so rumor said, in two duels, not with swords but with daggers. He had allowed himself to be shut up in a dark room with an enemy, and when the door was opened Dr. Jallien was found unharmed, while the other lay dead on the floor, without the semblance of the dagger's work on his person.

He was still under forty, had the suave manners of a polished Frenchman, and the soft hands of a dandy of the boulevards.

Sol Sphinx seemed to go over all he had heard of Dr. Jallien's past in the short silence which followed the close of the narration.

"What did you say was the matter with Miss Pearl?" he suddenly asked.

"She seems to have a wasting disease that baffles my skill," was the reply.

"Will it kill her?"

"I can not give you a professional opinion. That would not be fair, you know, but I can only state that I am doing all I can for the young lady, and I am proud to say that I possess the confidence of the household."

"Including Miss Pearl, doctor?"

Dr. Jallien started as though he could not help it.

"Well, yes, the confidence of the young lady herself," said he a moment later.

"That's a point in your favor."

"Mrs. Newport, who is almost prostrated over the strange disappearance of her step-daughter, has given me *carte blanche* in this matter, and begs that she be not disturbed. I am ready to give you all the information in my power, and thinking you would need a full description of the young lady, I have written it out and have it here."

The doctor turned to his desk and took from off it a folded paper which he handed to Sol Sphinx who, glancing at it, saw that it was a minute description of a young girl of twenty named Pearl Newport.

"Now, who in your opinion would want to kidnap this young girl?" asked Sol, looking up from the paper and catching the keen eye of the doctor.

"There's where the mystery lies. Miss Pearl has been raised as a house flower," was the response. "She has been under her step-mother's eye ever since she became Parke Newport's second wife."

"Miss Pearl is her father's main legatee is she not?"

"We understand so."

"And Newport is quite wealthy?"

"He is exceedingly well fixed."

"Worth how much?"

Again the soft dark eyes of the doctor glowed upon Sol Sphinx.

"I should say, at a venture, that Parke Newport is worth half a million," said he at last, and with deliberation.

"And Mrs. Newport, being a second wife,

has had her portion set aside has she not? I believe such was street talk when she married the broker."

"You are right."

"Miss Pearl is the heiress of the Newport thousands?"

"Just so, but that fact does not prevent Mrs. Newport from turning every stone in search of her."

"Certainly not," Sol Sphinx hastened to say. "We have to ask questions sometimes which seem out of place, you know. It belongs to the profession and sometimes helps us."

Dr. Jallien replied with a bland smile.

"You want me to investigate this case, I believe, doctor?"

"Such is Mrs. Newport's desire, and mine also. I am sure that Mr. Newport would second us if he were at home."

"Very well. I will do what I can. You want no publicity?"

"None at all, if possible. What a victory it would be to restore Pearl Newport to her home without the newspapers getting hold of it and dragging the young lady and her peculiar disease into the light! It would be doing her no good, and might hasten the end."

"Now, doctor, let me ask you a question or two," and the detective folded and put away the description of Pearl Newport which, until then, he had held in his hand.

"At your service," was the reply.

"You are called sometimes to X—street?"

The countenance of the doctor seemed to change, but very slightly.

"I go wherever I am summoned," said he.

"Have you ever been called to the tall tenement, No. 233, I believe?"

"I think I have been there; but let me see."

Dr. Jallien leaned toward his prescription-table and picked up a red-covered book.

His fingers ran softly over the leaves until they suddenly stopped.

"I have been there," said he, looking up. "You were right. It is No. 233. Ten families in the house, and some very strange people, too."

"Who were your patients there, doctor?"

Dr. Jallien referred to his book again.

"I have doctored a child named Tressy Harlow—a widow's child, I believe, and a man named Bromley."

"Jack Bromley?"

"Jack Bromley."

"Did the man die?"

"No, sir; I brought him through, though he was very near going over. I wasn't called in a moment too soon, either."

"What was the nature of his disease?"

"He had heart trouble. It was very serious, as I recall. It will take him off yet."

"It has taken him off."

The doctor, who was looking at the page, raised his eyes suddenly.

"Dead, is he?" he said, with that voice so peculiar to some medical men.

"Jack Bromley is dead."

"Found dead, I presume?"

"You are right. He was found dead—lying full length on the floor, and had been dead many hours when found."

"I warned him against such a death," said the doctor. "So Jack Bromley dead has proved my diagnosis? I don't miss these fellows very often," and the little book was closed and tossed back upon the table.

"I happened to be near the house when the man was first discovered and went up to see him," said Sol Sphinx. "Some people thought he might have been murdered—"

"He was—by heart failure," smilingly interrupted Dr. Jallien. "The post-mortem bore me out, I suppose."

"I don't know that there ever was an examination. They don't take much notice of such deaths in this city. But I must go back. I thank you for your information both in regard to Miss Newport and the man in the tall tenement. Am I to report to you?"

"To me, sir. Mrs. Newport is not to appear in this sad affair at all."

"All right; to you, then, doctor."

Sol Sphinx took his leave and bade Dr. Jallien good-night at the door of his office.

There was a singular smile upon the face of the detective as though he had achieved a triumph.

He glanced back at the shuttered-window and saw a streak of light where none had been a moment before.

But he did not see Dr. Jallien spring, panther-like from the room, and, throwing aside the swinging curtains of a rich parterre, halt in front of a young man whose eyes fairly glistened.

"You saw him, Danton?" he cried. "Now, don't lose sight of him. More than you think depends upon your skill, cunning and nerve."

The young man fell back and vanished.

CHAPTER V.

MIND MAGIC.

"So I am to report to you, am I, doctor?" mused Sol Sphinx, walking from the house of Dr. Jallien. "Miss Pearl Newport, the child of a millionaire, has disappeared and her step-

mother, one of the most beautiful women of New York, is not to appear in the matter at all. All is left to you, the family physician, which shows that Mrs. Newport has a great deal of confidence in you, doctor—more than some other people have. And that man who died in the solitude of his little room in the old tenement and whose body was missing when I took to see it his former partner, the Man from San Lopez? You were his doctor, too. You say he died of heart failure. Would your information stop there if you gave it free rein, doctor? Could you not tell more than you let out to me about the man called Jack Bromley, but who was, in reality, Quicksilver Dan, who came to this city to look for his wife, Queen Medea of the mines?"

Such thoughts amused the detective for some time. A few squares from the doctor's residence he boarded a passing car and rode some distance when he left it, passing on the rear platform a young man with a handsome face who had been watching him almost from the moment of his quitting the doctor's office.

Sol Sphinx consulted his watch as he reached the sidewalk.

"The Arizonian may have come back," said he. "I'll go and see him."

He was not far from the street upon which the Man from San Lopez had taken lodgings, and he at once hastened in that direction. The man encountered on the platform was at his heels, gliding along with the silken tread of the born shadower. If Sol had looked back, which he did not do, as though sure he was not tracked, he might have caught a glimpse of the sneaking spy fresh from Dr. Jallien's instructions; but he moved on unconscious of the espionage.

It was ten o'clock when the detective arrived at the door of the Arizonian's domicile. A light burning in the hall, for some late roomer probably, told him that the place was yet open, and in response to his ring, a mild-faced lady of forty came to the door.

"I don't think he has come back yet," said the lady, in reply to the ferret's inquiry concerning the Man from San Lopez. "He went off with a boy this afternoon and I have not seen him since."

"With a boy?" echoed the detective.

"Yes, one of those little street Arabs who do errands wherever they can pick them up."

"Did the big gentleman seem to know him?"

"I am quite sure from what I saw, and that wasn't much, that he had never seen the boy before. I do not say that he has not come back, for I have been in the back part of the house since six and he may have come in. You can go up, sir, and see for yourself."

This was just what the detective wanted, and the next moment he was mounting the stairs to the Arizonian's chamber.

He found it without difficulty from the woman's directions, and in a short time he stood in the room with the newly lighted gas illuminating every corner.

There was nothing to prove that the room had been occupied for hours. It was cold and cheerless despite the warmth imparted by the jet.

"Not here, that's certain," said Sol Sphinx.

"Gone off with a boy, eh?"

He turned toward the door and happening to look down, spied something half folded lying at his feet.

The detective stooped and pick it up. It proved to be a piece of paper with writing upon it, and going to the light he unfolded it, and to his astonishment read the very message the boy had brought to the Man from San Lopez.

Sol Sphinx read the writing again and again.

"This is what caught the yellow fox from Arizona," said he. "This is the decoy of the enemy and I have been made the bait. Mr. Te thought he was to be conducted to me, and did not hesitate to accompany the boy. A trap has been sprung and the fox is caught."

He read the message again, but this time seemed to study the shape of the letters as though they must afford him a clew to the writer.

The city ferret, standing in the light of the gas-jet, would have been a study for any one, and if the man standing in the shadow of the house and on the sidewalk below had seen him, his eyes would have received new light.

Dr. Jallien's spy, Danton, had not followed the detective into the house, but had stopped at the door and was waiting for his prey to come out.

When Sol had reperused the note until he knew it by heart he put it away in an inner pocket and took leave of the room.

He found the lady of the house waiting for him at the foot of the stairs.

"I found the room empty," said Sol. "I don't think my friend has been back since going off with the boy. What sort of a boy was he?"

The woman smiled at the absurdity of the question—absurd to her, at any rate.

"I don't think he was much unlike thousands of others who live in New York," she answered.

"They're pretty much all alike to me."

"Of course; but hadn't this particular one some peculiarity?"

"Come to think of it, he had—if you call a red head a peculiarity. He had that."

"And freckles?"

"I think not, though I wasn't very close to

him. After coming from my lodger's room he went out and stood against the house until the man came down, and then both went off together."

Sol Sphinx bade the woman good-night and took his departure. The man in the shadow waited until he had gone some distance when he left his place and resumed his trail.

The detective led him a good long chase before he showed any signs of slowing up.

When he did check his rapid walk he stood in front of a queer-looking house which seemed ready to tumble down from age.

"What on earth does he want in that house?" muttered the shadow, and even while the words fell from his tongue the detective vanished.

Sol Sphinx had merely lifted the latch of a worm-eaten door and passed into the dilapidated structure. He crossed a dark room, emerged from the house beyond its gloominess and found himself in a small court. In front of him rose a larger house than the one he had quitted, and in one of the windows burned a light which showed him the dimensions of the yard.

The ferret went toward this building and was in the act of bestowing a rap on a door when he was startled by the sound of foot-step behind him.

"Go right in," said a voice. "The door is open," and seeing the outlines of a female figure near him, the detective went forward, and in a dimly lighted room waited for the person who had spoken.

She came in presently with the step of a cat and stood before him with her face revealing a handsome woman under thirty clad in a close-fitting dress and with animation in the depths of brilliant eyes.

"I don't think he will follow you here," said this person.

"What, have I been followed, Kate?"

A smile broke over the woman's face.

"Followed and by a fox who knows what he is about," was the reply. "He saw you enter the house on the other street; he waited for you to come out, and when you had done so he threw himself at your heels once more and saw you plunge into the blind-way. I hardly think he will dare to come after you here."

Sol Sphinx and the woman went up a flight of steps together. The detective was shown into an elegantly furnished room while his companion illumined it with the several gas-burners suspended from the ceiling, and threw off her street cloak and stood before him a well-formed creature, but with a skin darker than that of the average American.

"What are you up to now?" asked the woman. "You have some trail or you would not be followed like a deer by the hound I have seen after you to-night."

Sol Sphinx, still toying with a card bearing the inscription "Catharine Scylla, Revealer of the Future," looked up into the face before him and smiled.

"I am on a trail, or at least I have just lost one, Kate," said he. "You can reveal the future. Here, tell me whether I shall pick it up again or no."

"Don't chaff me. I am no mystery to you," was the reply. "You know as much about the future as I do, but the world is full of dupes, and somebody must bleed them for a living. Why should it not be Kate Ravelin, or Catharine Scylla, the Revealer of the Future?"

"Just so," said the detective. "But you have done some wonderful things, Kate. I have witnessed some feats of mind power from you which I think no living soul could duplicate."

There was no reply to this, but the eyes of the woman, the person known to the outside world as a fortune-teller, but to Sol Sphinx as another being, seemed to lose their luster.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Kate Ravelin. "Shall I track the person who has followed you? Shall I trail him back to his master, if he has one?"

"Let the fox go. He will track me once too often. I am interested just now in a boy—a street Arab with red hair."

"One of a numerous family!" smiled the mind reader. "I am afraid I should find myself among a labyrinth of trails if I tried to track him."

"But you will try, Kate?"

"For you, yes."

Kate Ravelin moved from the chair she occupied and came closer to the detective. The color of life had left her face and it was now as white as the face of one dead.

"You must start me, you know," said she, holding out her hand which the detective took with the tips of his fingers. "You must show me the beginning of the trail, and maybe I can see the boy. But there are so many like him! If you can, I would that you would give me something easier."

Sol Sphinx thought of two persons at once.

Like a flash there rushed across his mind a dead man lying upon the floor of a little room in an old house, and the tall, giant-like figure of the Man from San Lopez.

Both were missing, the dead as well as the living. Why not try to recover their trails

through the mysterious powers possessed by the woman before him?

And, then, there was Pearl Newport, the missing heiress of the millionaire's riches. Why not start Kate upon her trail and restore her to the home from which she had suddenly vanished?

Perhaps he had potent reasons for not trying either of these three trails.

"We'll try to track the boy," said he. "Today he delivered a note to a tall man with a magnificent beard. The man lived in a little drab house standing behind two trees. The boy had red hair and the two—man and urchin—went off together. Can you see them?"

Kate Ravelin made no reply, but her gaze became fixed upon a certain spot, as it seemed, on the wall before her. Sol Sphinx, still holding her finger-tips, waited for her lips to move as she should indicate the trail of the lost boy.

He waited one—two—three minutes—three hours the time seemed to him.

"I see a boy," said the strange beauty slowly, her voice sounding unlike her natural tones. "He is small for his years and his hair is red. He is waiting at the door of a little drab house and shivering in the wind for he is poorly dressed. Now he starts; some one has come out of the house—a tall man who seizes the boy and almost lifts him off his feet. They move off together—the man and the boy. The boy is guiding him somewhere."

The woman stopped and though she made several efforts to proceed was unsuccessful.

The detective held his breath.

"I—have—lost the trail," she continued. "Something has crossed my path and I cannot recover it."

This was disappointing, and when the mind reader stood erect once more she passed her hand before her face and sighed.

"I have lost many trails of late," said she. "I don't know what has come over me. I seem to be losing my powers. Do you know that I believe that a mind more powerful than mine is robbing me of my talent?"

"But you had found the boy!" cried the detective. "You had begun at the beginning. You had struck the trail of the boy and his victim, and were on it when you lost the thread. You couldn't go back, could you?"

"But I might not recover the thread lost," was the reply. "One effort weakens me. It is because of this other power—this deadly thing which has come between me and my talent, and which is breaking me up. Do you know Doctor Jallien?"

The girl seemed to shiver when she uttered the doctor's name.

"I have just come from him," said the detective.

"Bringing with you a part of the curse?" cried Kate Ravelin.

"Who is this Doctor Jallien?"

"That is his great secret. Who is he? You must go to others than me for that. You must ask those who know the past life of that handsome tiger who keeps his claws protected by velvet, but who uses them now and then. You have just come from him? Did the spy I saw at your heels track you from Doctor Jallien's office?"

"As I have told you, I saw no one upon my track."

"Come. Let us go back to the lost trail. I will try again for you. You want to find the boy I have lost. Now."

Once more the beautiful mind-reader passed into her mysterious state, with the tips of her fingers resting in the detective's palm.

"I see the boy, but he is alone," slowly said the lips watched like a hawk by Sol Sphinx. "He is sleeping in the moonlight, in a low cot in one corner of a dingy room. The house is old and rotten, and the boy has not sufficient covering to protect him from the wind. There is a red-fronted saloon across the street, but the wild noises that come from it do not disturb the boy. He sleeps on. It is the boy I saw with the tall man, but I have lost the man himself."

The face of the girl slowly resumed its normal coloring; the light of every day came back to the eyes and she was herself again.

"You have found the boy for me," cried Sol Sphinx. "I know where the red-fronted saloon is and the old house across the street. I once searched the rookery from top to bottom, but the boy was not there then. Good-night. I will see you by-and-by. You must not lose your powers, for I may have great use for them before this dark case has been brought to an end."

The detective was at the door, and as his hand touched the knob he found it pressed by the finger of the young fortune-teller.

"Watch for the fox who was on your trail to-night!" she said. "And, if you can spare the time, hunt up the past of that leopard-natured doctor."

The following moment Kate Ravelin was alone.

CHAPTER VI.

GETTING BLOOD OUT OF A TURNIP.

THE New York ferret quitting the young fortune-teller's house by a way other than by which he had entered it, avoided the man who

was watching for him near the entrance of the tumble-down structure which Kate had aptly termed the blind-way.

"That's a wonderful woman," said Sol to himself, thinking of the person he had left behind. "She has a life history which she has kept from me, but which I am confident I will know some of these days. She has told me that she has a secret enemy—one with silken claws like a tiger, and to-night for the first time she asked me about Doctor Jallien. Is the handsome doctor the girl's foil? Is his the power which she avers is sapping her strength, in other words robbing her of that singular power of tracing people in a trance? That girl has been invaluable to me on many occasions. She has shown me many trails and warned me of more than one danger, and I hope to use her again. But if she is losing her powers, and it seems so from her failure to track the Arizonian and his boy guide to-night, I will lose my best assistant, and the fellows like Nick Turbot, my rival, will rejoice over some failures of mine. I might have asked her to go back and follow the dead body of Quicksilver Dan, or have given her a clew to Miss Newport, but I can come back to these things. What I want now is to find the boy who acted as the decoy for the Arizonian's enemies. In the old rookery opposite the red saloon, eh? I have never known Kate to deceive me. Her powers never lie."

The detective drew his hat down over his smooth face and bent his head to the cold wind which had been blowing almost without a moment's cessation for two whole days.

He flitted under the gas-lamp like a ghost and lost himself ere long among the shadows of a street where but few lights threw their glare.

In due time Sol Sphinx came to a hard-looking house which stood directly opposite a red-fronted building which was plainly revealed by a private light which hung over the door.

This was the saloon seen by Kate Ravelin in her trance.

"In this old shell is he, eh?" thought the detective. "Now, in which of its many rooms shall I find the young sleeper?"

He found the front door open—it was never found otherwise by any one—and the next moment he stood in the foul hallway looking inquiringly up the flight of steps that seemed to lose itself in the darkness overhead.

He was thus engaged when a loud laugh saluted his ears and a door opening on his left a man reeled from a room and fell back at sight of him.

"I thought ye war a cop, pard," said this individual, coming up to Sol with some degree of assurance. "But ye'r not, though I take it that you don't roost in this coop."

"I'm looking for the red-headed boy who does," said Sol.

"For Billy Bee, now?" grinned the man. "And what business might a gentleman o' yer stripe have with him? But niver mind that. You want him and that's enough. The first nest to the right on the fourth landing, though he mayn't be in yet, for he's a night-owl like the rest o' us."

The detective nodded and started up the steps, leaving the man leering drunkenly at him from the floor.

"What kin sech as he want o' Billy Bee?" he heard from below. "'Pears ter me I've seen his face before. Is he one o' them private cops, or a spotter and wants to know what piece o' rascality Billy was in last? 'Pears ter me that's it; but he wouldn't tell me if I axed 'im, which I won't do."

Sol went up to the fourth floor without stopping, though the steps were knee breaking in their steepness, and when he reached the door designated by the man below he halted and listened.

To all appearance he was the sole person on that floor. The top of the rookery was buried in silence, but noises which told that other parts were not came up from the regions he had left.

He at last tried the latch of the door.

The old portal moving at the slightest touch, for it could not have been kept shut, having no catch that would hold, he stepped inside and saw dimly and by the light of the cold stars that glittered frostily over the sleeping city the outlines of a table and a cot on the floor.

Was Billy at home?

Eager to solve this mental query upon which so much that was dark might depend, the ferret went forward as noiselessly as possible and bent over the cot.

His sharp eyes made out upon it the figure of a boy, fast asleep, one of the hands holding almost savagely the edge of a scanty coverlid which was slipping away. The little fellow had gone to bed with his clothes on, and the detective, by close looking, saw that he had the traditional red hair, and in abundance.

Falling back a step, Sol Sphinx drew forth his tinned box and lit the magic candle therein.

As the light shot up he detected a sudden movement on the part of the boy on the couch, and the following moment he was sitting bolt upright, staring with all eyes at the intruder.

"W'ot yer want?" asked the boy, wide awake

without rubbing his eyes. "I've done nuthin' ter be dragged to the station, fur, though you don't show yer badge, I know w'ot yer ar' all the same."

Sol looked at the boy and made no reply for a second.

"You're not to be dragged anywhere if you tell the truth," said he. "You are Billy Bee?"

"I can't help it if I am. I wasn't responsible for that name."

"Of course yer weren't, Billy."

The boy had by this time left the couch, and was standing in front of the detective, with his hands rammed into his pockets as if for warmth.

"You needn't be afraid ter talk loud, for I'm the only chick in this part o' the nest. They say it's haunted. But w'ot do I keer for a headless ghost w'ot don't disturb boys?"

Sol now saw by the glow of his light that the boy had deep eyes of liquid brown, and that, despite his miserable garments, he was really good-looking, though in language terribly uncouth.

"Where did you leave your partner, Billy?" he suddenly asked.

"W'ot pardner?"

"Come. You mustn't try to deceive me," Sol Sphinx spoke, with some sternness. "Where did you leave the big man with the heavy yellow beard?"

In a moment the boy's face changed. That instant he became a perfect Sphinx.

He glued his lips tightly, and falling back looked at the detective as if to say:

"Catch me napping if you can!"

Sol saw the resolute countenance, and noted the look which accompanied it.

The boy had a secret and was going to keep it. That was very plain.

"Did you guide him to the party who gave you the letter?" continued Sol.

No answer.

"Did you do just as the gentleman bade you—take the big man to the place he designated?"

A faint smile came to Billy's lips, and the semblance of a twinkle appeared in the depths of the brown eyes, but that was all.

Questioning the tenant of the ghost-haunted top of the rookery was like getting blood out of a turnip.

"You obeyed the gentleman to the letter, did you?" resumed Sol. "I only wanted to know because I am that gentleman's friend and we want your report."

For a moment it seemed as though this bit of by-play was about to unlock the boy's mouth, but he took new resolution, as if he had suddenly seen through the scheme and remained as silent as ever.

"You will answer these questions in another place," suddenly exclaimed Sol Sphinx with the air of a man who has lost patience.

"Do you mean at the station?"

The boy had spoken at last, and falling back almost to the edge of his couch, he stared at Sol with his fists shut as tight as wax and fire in his eyes.

"I did not say where, but you may have guessed correctly," was the reply. "You may not know that the man who sent you with the message has been arrested and that he is laying all the blame upon you."

"That's whar you're lyin'," laughed the boy. "No man sent me anywhar with a message for a big man with a yaller beard."

Sol Sphinx saw suddenly, in the face of the boy as it were, a new revelation.

"Come, come, Billy, I was just trying you. You don't lie, though you want to keep your secret. The woman who sent you with that message paid you well, did she?"

The boy was looking at a piece of paper which the detective was holding in his hand and despite his efforts at concealment it was evident that he had seen it before.

It was the decoy message which he had picked up on the floor of the Arizonian's lodgings.

"Whar did yer git that?" asked Billy.

"Where it was left."

"Did the man drop it on the street?"

"I found it in his room just after you took him away."

There was no reply.

"She must have wanted to see the big man very badly," continued the detective. "She's handsome ain't she, Billy?"

"I don't know."

"What, didn't you see her face and she gave you this note?"

"I say I don't know. That's all."

The lips met again. Over the face before the ferret came that old seal of resolution which meant that he would go no further and that the person whom he had served would not be betrayed.

The boy backed up against the cold wall of his den and stubbornly folded his arms.

The detective seemed to have reached the end of the inquisition, and that when it was promising so well.

"You don't want to be mixed up in a scrape," said he. "You don't want to commence so young to get your name in the papers and your phiz in the rogue's gallery."

"Why don't I? Ain't it better than playing traitor?" said the boy.

"But it marks you for life. There's a better future before you than living under the eye of Captain Byrnes and his men. This woman you have served is not worth sticking to."

"Thar may be two opinions on that subject," answered the immobile boy.

"She may have committed a crime."

"You couldn't hang me for it if she has."

"You say you didn't see her face?"

Billy Bee kept silence.

"Was that face veiled?"

"I decline to answer. Here, take me to the station. I don't propose to begin life by playing traitor. You needn't draw the nippers, 'cause I'll go without 'em."

Sol Sphinx, met at every thrust by the keen boy, was nonplused. He had no thought of putting Billy Bee under arrest. That would give publicity to his trail, something which he did not want it to have, and he could not help rewarding the boy's faithfulness with a smile.

"Why don't you take me? I kin have my nap out in the cell," the little fellow went on. "When I'm gone the headless ghost kin have full swing in the old rookery, though he's had that a long time."

"You won't tell me any more about the man you guided from the drab house for that woman?" queried Sol.

"It wouldn't be fair, pardner."

"You may never see her again."

"I can't help that; I'd be betrayin' her all the same."

Sol Sphinx could have cursed outright the nervy stubbornness of the tenant of the nest.

He was confident that the boy knew whither he had conducted the Man from San Lopez, and now that he had confessed that the decoy letter had been given to him by a woman, he (the ferret) was equally certain that the Arizonian had fallen into a deadly trap, set by the very powers he had come East to thwart.

And that boy could set him upon the trail! He could make plain the path which Kate, the mind reader, had lost owing to the power which was weakening her wonderful talent. The breast of a red-headed street Arab held the secret which might unlock the door of mystery and add greatly to his reputation as a ferret.

For some time, with a thousand thoughts revolving through his brain, Sol Sphinx eyed the cool boy who had beaten him at his own game of shrewdness, and tried to fit another arrow to his bow.

Billy Bee had met him at every turn and baffled him, though he had dropped one important side confession—that he was a woman's decoy.

"I guess I will have to let you keep your secret, though you'll not come to a very good end from the way you've started out in life," said Sol, breaking into a laugh which was forced.

"I'll take the risk and assume the pressure," grinned Billy Bee, stretching his suspenders and letting them strike his chest.

"All right; they may prove too much for you. Good-night," and with a final look into the eyes which once more had the merry twinkle of victory, Sol Sphinx turned away and left the boy to his musings.

"One point gained, but a thousand lost," said the detective, going down the stairs to the street far below. "The one drop of blood I got out of that turnip must be treasured and made to tell. The Man from San Lopez is in the net of the spoiler. He may have been watched ever since he set foot in the city. His beard and Western manners would render him conspicuous anywhere. The person who wrote the decoy note intrusted to Billy Bee knew that the Arizonian had been with me—that we had visited the tall tenement together, and also, as I now believe—that the corpse of Quicksilver Dan was not there to greet us. We'll meet again, Master Bee, and the next time you may be more communicative. I own you beat me to-night. I must go back to Kate ere long. She must put her waning powers to the test again. She shall pick up the woman who gave Billy that letter. I must find the Man from San Lopez. Dead or alive, I must unearth the owner of the yellow beard. He may have followed Quicksilver Dan. If so, he fell by the same hand, though Doctor Jallien says heart failure took the hermit-miner off."

The detective was on the street now, and the cunning, boyish face at the top of the rookery disappeared, for Billy Bee could hear the ferret's footsteps no longer.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FATAL DROP.

SOL SPHINX was pushing through light and shadow, when a figure ran up the steps of Dr. Jallien's house, and without knocking went in.

This was the young spy called Danton. His eyes had an eager look, and when he found himself in the little room which the doctor called his office, he went to a sideboard and took out a small bottle, from which he took a hearty drink.

"That's the stuff which gives a man back his best days," grinned the youth. "I begin to believe that the doctor can raise the dead," and he broke into a laugh as he replaced the bottle and shut the door in the wall.

He found no one in the room when he entered, and quitting it, he stretched himself on a sofa in an adjoining apartment, and appeared to fall asleep.

By and by a door near him opened noiselessly, and the figure of Dr. Jallien stole across the room. He did not glance toward the sofa, and therefore did not see the young man thereon, but a pair of watchful eyes followed him until he had passed into his office.

Jallien drew a chair up to the table, and fell to reading something written in a woman's hand, on a slip of paper which he had taken from his pocket. The face of the handsome doctor was aglow with excitement of some kind, and his eyes seemed to get a new glitter while he read.

Behind him the soft curtains parted and the keen eyes of Danton regarded him. They remained thus for some time, watching the doctor like a hawk, and not until the note had been read twice did they look away.

All at once Dr. Jallien pocketed the note and opened the sideboard which Danton had lately visited.

He took down the same bottle which the young man had tapped, but instead of drinking of its contents as they were, he poured out some in a wine-glass, and taking a tiny vial from his pocket, added a colorless liquid to it.

"The drinking world would give much for my secrets," smiled the doctor, holding the glass between him and the light. "It would like to know what all I have accomplished with all my study and research. I could speak and astonish New York as it has never been astonished. I have found more than the elixir of life. I have discovered that which would have made the Borgias jealous. Ha, ha, I have found out how to kill and how to restore. But what has become of Danton? Did the inquisitive fox outwit him?"

He drank off the contents of the glass, it sending a strange glow over his face, and restored it to the sideboard.

Not until then did the face at the curtain vanish. Danton fell back, walked to the door behind him, and opened and shut it as if he had just entered the house that way.

Dr. Jallien, with a smile, turned to greet his ferret.

"Well, my boy!" cried he, looking at Danton's face as if trying to read his report in his eyes. "You kept track of that man, did you?"

"Till I lost him," was the reply.

In an instant the face of the doctor clouded.

"Lost him, did you?" he shouted. "By heavens! you were not to do anything of the kind."

"I know it, sir," confessed Danton. "But these detectives are as cunning as foxes."

"You must outshine them in that respect. You lost this one, did you?"

"He went into an old house and did not come out. I waited until I grew tired. It was no use; he would not show himself again."

"Where is that house?"

"I don't believe it has any number."

"But you know where it is?"

"It stands on N— street, and is the worst house on the Square. It is a decrepit place, not good enough for rats, let alone a man like the person I was to watch. He went in there, sir, and did not come out."

"Not as you saw, eh?"

"That is right."

The countenance of the French-blooded doctor underwent a change. It seemed to soften toward the young man, and presently a smile appeared where a frown had been.

"You weren't afraid to follow him into the old trap, were you, Danton?" he asked.

"It was not that; but I did not know but that I might have run against him, and that would have told him that I had tracked him."

Dr. Jallien nodded.

"That is true, boy. I think you went far enough. In the old house, eh? A strange place for the man of trails, but not so strange, either, when one comes to think of it."

The last words were spoken in a lower tone, but they did not escape the ears of Danton.

"Did he go straight to the old trap?"

"No, sir. He visited another house."

"Ah! You followed him thither, of course?"

"I did. It was No. 654 X— street."

Dr. Jallien started.

"Did he remain there very long?"

"Not more than ten minutes all told."

"That's all, Danton; the rest of the night is yours."

The young man bowed and slipped from the room, found an overcoat on a peg and, putting it on, glided from the house and vanished. Dr. Jallien sat at the table a few moments longer when he, too, arose and left the room. He was crossing the threshold of the private office when a sound caught his ear and he stopped and confronted a girl who had made her appearance.

"I must have some more of the medicine," said she lifting a pair of heavy eyes to the doctor. "I can't sleep without it."

"Not a drop," sternly cried Dr. Jallien. "I want you to remain awake, for I am going out."

"Have you been called?"

"What is it to you whether I have or not?" was the quick and angry retort.

"But I will die without the medicine."

The man laughed.

"You don't look like a dying person," was his reply.

"But just one drop," pleaded the girl.

Dr. Jallien turned back and took out a small case from which he selected a vial.

"That is the one thing worth living for," cried the girl who had followed him.

He dropped one drop of the contents of the vial into the wine-glass, poured it full of water and handed it to the eager girl whose hands gripped it as if it were a matter of life and death, and downing the whole dose at a gulp, sprung from the room with the speed of a gazelle.

The next minute Dr. Jallien followed her and was soon upon the street with his collar turned up and but little of her face visible to the pedestrian. As for the girl, she entered a room and threw herself into an elegant chair and shut her eyes dreamily. In a little while a sense of sleep seemed to steal over her, but a smile came to her lips and she rocked herself gently, as if under the influence of the secret drug.

"I was not to sleep, but how delicious it is!" she suddenly cried, opening his eyes again. "What a wonderful man! He can do anything. I would not quit his service for the world for it is paradise to live under his roof."

She arose and crossed the room.

"Why not get some of it for myself?" she continued moving toward the office. "I know exactly what it looks like and can tell it the moment I see it. If I had some of it I need not be asking him for it all the time. I could take a dose now and then and he need not be bothered with my importunities."

She slipped into the dimly-lighted office with the tread of a cat; she made her way to the rows of little bottles that stood on several shelves on one side of the room and held one after the other to the light.

"He may keep his supply of the precious stuff in the laboratory," she said. "If that is locked I know where there is a key. I'll take it along, anyhow."

For a moment she disappeared but came back soon with a small key in her hand, and opening a door at one side of the office vanished again, and was soon climbing a flight of steps which she knew terminated at Dr. Jallien's laboratory at the top of the house.

The key which she had found just fitted the lock and she entered the place. It was dark, but she turned on some light and saw the many strange retorts and crucibles among which Dr. Jallien was thoroughly at home.

The maid moved across the room and stood in front of a little cupboard set in the wall near the doctor's work-bench. The door was shut and locked, but one of a bunch of keys which she had brought to the room opened it and a hundred vials stood in full view.

"It must be here," said the girl. "The elixir of life must be within my reach."

She took up the vials one by one and held them between her and the jet.

"This looks like it; it has no color," she cried at last. "And it smells like it, too!"

She shook the little vial and saw the bright silver bubbles that danced on the liquid within.

The following moment she spied a wine-glass and in a second was holding the uncorked vial over it.

"Why not test it?" she mused. "He will never know it. He would not miss a hundred drops from the bottle and I won't take half that number off."

A good sized drop of the colorless fluid came to the edge of the vial and dropped into the wine-glass. The girl poured out another drop.

Then she filled the glass half full of water and drank of the whole.

In less than half a minute a startling change came over the intermeddler's face. The rosy glow gave place to a deathly pallor; the wine-glass fell from her hands and was shattered at her feet; she drew back from the cupboard gasping and pressing her hand upon her heart; she tried to shriek, but the effort was a failure, and she staggered toward the door which she had left open.

"I've drank death—my God!" cried the poor creature at last. "A thousand curses on the head of Doctor Jallien!"

She seemed to have been struck with blindness, for she was clutching at the door and missing it all time. Presently she got out into the hall and the next moment fell in a heap at the top of the steps, lying there like a person smitten with death.

The light glowed in the laboratory a few feet away. It fell upon the fatal vial and shattered goblet; but the victim of woman's curiosity did not stir.

An hour passed and she was lying there as still as ever. At the end of this time a door below opened and shut. Presently the handsome but astonished face of Dr. Jallien appeared at the foot of the stairs.

"I left the laboratory dark," he said. "Who has opened it?—not Mazie, the foolish thing, I hope."

He ran up the steps, three at a time; he stum-

bled over the figure on the landing and, drawing back, uttered a cry of horror.

"She was tempted to her sorrow," said the doctor, picking up the body and bearing it into the room ahead.

He held it in his arms while he reached over his work-bench and took a bottle from the little cupboard. Uncorking it with one hand, he forced open the girl's mouth and poured the contents of the bottle into it.

Then he watched the face with breathless curiosity, and after a while seized another bottle and dropped several drops of a greenish liquid upon the girl's tongue.

This last medicine had the desired effect, for the eyes slowly opened and regarded Dr. Jallien with a sort of stare.

"Why did you bring me back?" cried Mazie when she found she could speak again. "I was in a land of delights and I didn't want to come back to this one."

The listener smiled.

The girl was permitted to slip from Dr. Jallien's arms and he saw her glide toward the door.

"Look here," he said. "I want to warn you once for all. Life and death stand side by side in this house, and you don't know which is which. I came in the nick of time. You were in the shadows of death; I don't care what you saw in your stupor; but you must not take that which is locked to you."

There was no answer. Mazie slipped across the step, and while he listened to her feet going down the stairs, a sinister smile stole over Dr. Jallien's face.

"May be I should have remained away," said he.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VAILED QUARRY.

SOL SPHINX stood once more in a room which seemed to have a singular fascination for him—the room in which Quicksilver Dan died.

It was night and below him were the thousand and one street lamps that illumined the great city. He had come to the place without disturbing Nancy Harlow and her daughter, who were painting feathers in the room underneath, and now he was going over the scene of mystery with the care and patience of an old detective.

The sudden disappearance of the dead man was a puzzle which mystified Sol as much as the vanishment of the Man from San Lopez. He believed that the solution of one problem would lead to the solution of the other, and that is why he had come to the room—creeping up the stairs in a manner that prevented the steps from creaking.

His little pocket lamp was doing service again, for, shielding its light with his body, he was poking it into out-of-the-way places which his eyes were surveying with the cunning of a lynx's.

The detective seemed to have forgotten Billy Bee and the tussle he had had to extract information from the little tenant of the rookery, but the truth is that the boy was even then in his mind.

"It's about as hard to find anything here as it was to get a clew from Billy Bee," said the ferret to himself while he examined the uncouth apartment which had not been tenanted since Dan died. "I fear I shall have to go back and test Kate's powers. The girl will do anything for me, but I don't like to put her to a test which I can see is proving her death-warrant. What is this?"

"This," was a scrap of paper which he picked from the floor at the foot of the bed which Jack Bromley had used. He held it close to his lamp and opened it. But it contained nothing but an address which was barely discernible, and, to the detective's amusement, mentioned Dr. Jallien.

"This establishes the fact that the doctor was his physician but he promptly admitted as much to me," continued Sol. "But why should Quicksilver Dan send for him when there were other doctors much nearer?"

He studied the writing of the address with more curiosity than before. The chirography was small and womanish.

"This is a woman's work," suddenly thought Sol Sphinx. "This address was left by the visitor he had several days before his death. She told him about Doctor Jallien. Why? What interest had she in the life of this hermit miner—this man who robbed Morte of San Lopez? He became the husband of Medea, the Mine Queen, so Morte says. Did she visit him here? Was she the vailed woman Mrs. Harlow encountered on the stairs? I believe I have found something at last."

The detective put the paper in his pocket and resumed the search.

Suddenly out went his little light and he stood in darkness as dense as that of an Egyptian tomb. Not only this, but he pressed himself into a corner and hugged the wall as if he would squeeze his body into it.

The door opened and there was a puff of air in the room.

"I'll show you that it's not occupied," said a voice which startled the hidden ferret.

The next instant a streak of light fell across the floor and revealed the spot where he had seen the dead body of Quicksilver Dan.

But look as he might he could not make out more than the outlines of the speaker. He could see that the person who held the light was a tall one, and that near by stood another being, not so tall.

"Of course I'll rent the place at once," continued the same voice. "I can get a renter without much trouble nowadays."

"But you'll clean it up first, won't you? You won't let anything that was his remain?"

"Not a thing," was the reply.

"That is right."

The last voice bespoke the woman. It was modulated and indicated refinement, but it attracted the detective in a manner he was never to forget.

"I'll destroy every vestige of his living here."

"Look well to the walls; but then you say you never knew him to deface them."

"I'll let you look for yourself now."

"No; I leave that to you," was the answer. "I haven't time to do this thing which you can do just as well. Rent the room as soon as possible, and don't neglect the other instructions."

The light on the floor crept back to the door and presently the portal shut and the detective was in the dark once more. He did not occupy his place very long for the footsteps outside had barely died away when he was at the door listening there with the ear of a fox.

After awhile he stepped out into the narrow hall beyond it. He leaned over the balustrade and looked down upon the two figures on the landing below.

One was that of a man, a janitor-like looking person, and the other a woman closely habited and with a veil over her face. They were standing close together and while the ferret watched them he saw the woman's hand move forward and drop something in the outstretched palm of the other.

"Remember," was the only word that floated up to the detective and the tableau vanished and left him looking at nothing for the place was dark below.

Sol Sphinx waited a few moments, when he left his post and crept down. If the stairs creaked no one seemed to hear them, and he threw a hasty glance toward Mrs. Harlow's room as he passed it. He did not stop till he reached the street where he threw his eyes around for the vailed woman.

In a moment he was rudely brushed by some one who entered the tenement and when he recovered he heard a coarse laugh beyond the open door.

Sol was sure he had not reached the street more than two minutes after the woman, but he did not know which way to turn.

He was in the heart of his dilemma when a boy slipped up and gave him a sharp look. The next moment the detective had the boy by the arm.

"Did you see a woman come out of this house?" asked Sol.

"What's it worth?" was the answer.

"A dollar."

The gamin held out the dirtiest hand imaginable.

"She went that way," said he closing on the dollar which Sol dropped into his palm, and breaking from the boy the ferret started in pursuit.

All at once he caught sight of a flitting figure before him. It was that of a woman and as he neared it he could see the floating edges of a veil. This was the woman who had stood in the room where Quicksilver Dan had died, and Sol Sphinx knew the value of following her wherever she went.

She did not seem to fear pursuit for she did not look behind her, but kept the middle of the sidewalk, passing fearlessly under the lamps and leading the detective a long chase.

He studied the figure as best he could and saw that it was shapely and that a small foot played in and out among the skirts.

The time came when the figure stopped and waited for a car coming slowly down the street. Sol Sphinx followed her when she had entered the car and stood in the shadows on the rear platform. The car jolted on, the vailed creature in one of the forward corners, and a dozen squares were passed before she moved.

At last the detective's quarry came toward him and left the car, passing so close to him that she actually brushed his sleeve, and in another moment she was moving up the steps of an "L" station and he saw her board one of the up-town cars on the Elevated Road.

Ten minutes after this last move Sol Sphinx's prey left the last car and he saw her on the street once more. Not until then did she seem to fear that she might be followed. She turned to him all at once as she left the car and gave him a look which made him wince.

"What if she has recognized me?" thought the ferret. "She is too near home to be lost now. I must track her there. She knows how Quicksilver Dan died—I don't care who she is nor what her position in New York society; and

that is the mystery I am going to solve if it costs me my life."

But the sharp look which he had received from the woman had not found him out, for she went off without looking back, evidently thinking that he was not unlike a hundred other men she had seen within the last twenty-four hours, and at length the detective saw her run up the steps of a handsome house and enter with a pass-key.

At home at last!

There was no doubt of his success. He had tracked this woman from the dark purlieus of the city, from the tenement to the mansion; he had not lost sight of her for a minute; he had been an indefatigable trail dog from the beginning.

He waited till the door had closed upon the form of the veiled woman and then he passed the mansion.

The number was plainly visible above the portal, outlined on a reddish background, but this was not all. His sharp eyes caught sight of a silver door-plate, and as he passed the house he read a name which sent a thrill through him:

"PARKE NEWPORT."

There were other Newports in the city but this was the millionaire—the father of the young girl who was missing, as told him by Dr. Jallien; the husband of one of the handsomest women between Harlem Bridge and the Battery.

No wonder a thrill shot through the detective at sight of that door-plate.

He could not name the woman he had tracked from the tenement to the mansion. He had not seen her face for the veil; but she had entered Parke Newport's house and that was something.

Sol Sphinx would have given much if he could have been permitted to follow the woman beyond the door, but he had to remain on the sidewalk with the March wind cutting his face.

"It's more than something; it's a good deal," mused the ferret of Gotham. "I could go back to Kate now with a tangible trail and give her powers a good start. Why not do it? Or had I best wait and work this trail myself?"

He looked back at the house which he had just passed and saw a light in one of the upper windows. It remained there but a moment, when it vanished and left the window dark.

Sol Sphinx watched the house a little longer. The hour was not very late.

All at once a figure appeared on the front step and slipped off.

"That's not the same walk," mused the detective, following at once. "This is not the person I followed from No. 233."

He tracked the new prey into the next street when he found that he was really after a different person from the one he had lately followed.

"This is the servant," said he. "I have left the mistress at home."

The girl—she was little more with her slight figure and fresh face—led the detective a long chase, but did not try to elude him. She was not hard to follow, and he kept her in sight until she turned into a quiet street and entered a plain house next door to a small notion store.

Sol Sphinx entered the store and was about to set on foot an inquiry concerning the people next door when he heard a footstep and a female's voice behind him.

A moment later he was looking into the face of the woman he had been tracking.

"I won't be gone very long, Johnny," she cried to the young man behind the counter. "I couldn't get off any sooner; mistress was out, you know. So now I'll go down and see what Kate Scylla, the fortune-teller, knows about my future."

She was off with the last word sounding in the ferret's ears. She, Mrs. Newport's maid, was going to Kate Ravelin's house!

The bare thought was enough to take the detective of Gotham from the store without much ceremony.

"I must beat her to Kate's," cried he. "She must be posted about her visitor, and reveal just what she ought to know."

The girl was still in sight, but he did not follow. He knew a shorter route to the young mind reader's domicile and took it at once.

Nothing stopped him between his new starting point and the tumble-down house which led him to the rear door of Kate Ravelin's home. He plunged into the trap, went through it and emerged into the small open court beyond.

But just when about to rush up to the door always open to him, he saw it open in his face and, drawing back just in the nick of time, his startled eyes beheld a man come out.

Sol Sphinx stared at the man as he walked across the court, and when he entered the old house for the purpose of passing through it, he sprang after him. Something in the walk had attracted his attention.

He saw the mind-reader's visitor emerge from the trap and gain the sidewalk where the light of a lamp fell for a moment upon face and figure.

What the detective saw then almost drew a cry of astonishment from his lips.

He was looking at handsome Dr. Jallien, "the velvet-clawed tiger" as Kate called him!

There could be no mistake, and when the doctor moved off Sol Sphinx sprang toward the girl's house.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WRONG MAN.

WHILE these events were transpiring in light and shadow not far from the old house which led to Kate Ravelin's domicile a man was watching from one of four corners in an underground cell a light which had been his only companion for hours.

It burned along a dull wall and near an inscription which he had seen a jeweled hand write amid startling silence.

The man was darkly handsome, with a long beard which looked like many gold strands in the glow of the jet, but there had lately come to his face an expression of maniacal fury and his hands were clinched so that his nails were barely discernible.

Need we name the captive of the subterranean room?

Many hours had passed since he saw the hand write his doom on the wall. The jet had not flickered once since then, but had burned steadily, showing him the words: "Die as the fool dieth" on the stone.

The Man from San Lopez was still in the merciless grip of his tormentors; he was walled in with the light burning against the wall, and it promised to shine upon his corpse on the cold stones.

Food had been let down from the opening near the light, and he had not refused it. He wanted to keep his strength. He did not know how soon he might need it, and he had not come to New York—had not left the mines of Arizona—to perish without a valiant struggle for existence.

"I'd like to know what Sol Sphinx thinks of my disappearance now," he said. "Does he know that I have fallen into the trap they set for me? Does he suspect that I have found Queen Medea, the wife of Quicksilver Dan, whose corpse didn't greet us when we went to whar the detective left it? Maybe he'll let me take care of myself and not look after the matter any longer—thinking that I've vamoosed the city and left the trail. I wonder if he will think anything of the kind? If I could see him just now—if I could know whether he had abandoned me to my fate—I might give up the fight and wait calmly for the close of the game. But I won't do anything of the kind. What did I come here for? To find them! I left behind me the biggest oath ever recorded in Arizony—I swore alone on the mountain, with the stars and my God overhead, to avenge the ruin that woman wrought. And is this to be end of it?"

He stopped and looked at the inscription on the wall. All at once he crossed the room and halted just beneath the jet.

"That is to be a lie—that writing, I mean," he went on. "I don't intend to die as the fool dieth. Morte of San Lopez will make that line a lie, and the hand that wrote it shall know that it wrote a desperate lie in the light."

The only answer he heard was the echo of his hot words, and while they sounded he fell back and glared at the line like a hungry tiger.

Then he fell to moving round his cage. He had done so before, but it seemed to rest him, and already his boot heels had worn a pathway in the floor. Round and round he went, always looking up at the words whenever he came near them, and on such occasions his teeth seemed to crack.

There came a time when the Man from San Lopez stopped in his ceaseless rounds and stared at a band which had been thrust from the little opening near the light. It was the same hand which had written on the wall.

"I wonder what's coming now?" he mentally exclaimed. "That's a bit of charcoal between thumb and finger. Am I to have another quotation, or is it to be something else?"

He fell back from the wall and folded his arms, standing like a Hercules in the light with his eyes riveted on the hand.

Slowly the hand was turned upward until it almost touched the spot where the first inscription stood. He saw the charcoal lean toward the wall, and in a moment it was writing there.

What were the words the black pencil was forming? What did they bode him—death or liberty?

He seemed to hold his breath till the hand stopped. It was at the end of a short line, and with a sneer which, perhaps the eyes behind the wall saw, he read:

"You have two hours to live!"

Then the hand was withdrawn and the charcoal fell to the floor.

The quick eye of the Man from San Lopez caught sight of the falling object, and in a flash he had pounced upon it, clutching it in his own dark grip.

Glancing up at the opening, he sprang across the room and reached the opposite wall.

In a moment he was writing there, not in very elegant style, but largely and plain, and this is what shone on the dull wall in glistening black:

"I defy the Queen of Arizony! She is a thief and murderess! Tell her so for Morte of San Lopez!"

He fell back from his work with an air of triumph, and pointing to it wheeled toward the opening in the wall, and cried:

"Read that, you witch of the jeweled hand! Every word is true. Two hours to live, eh? When you kill Morte you but add to the crimes of the past and fasten at your mistress' throat the hand of death and vengeance!"

If he expected an answer to these words he was disappointed, for naught but silence rewarded him. He looked at his defiance and underscored it with the charcoal, then dashed the piece away and laughed over his work.

"I thought I recognized that hand," said he to himself. "I saw one like it not very long ago, but not in this part of Uncle Sam's dominion. Was it hers? Was that the hand I've been looking for—the hand of Medea, the Mine Queen? By heavens, I believe it!"

Ten minutes later the Man from San Lopez noted something which he had not seen before. Water was trickling down one of the walls of his dungeon.

At first he was inclined to think this a delusion, and he moved across the floor and laid his hand on the wall. It was wet in a moment, and he discovered that water was dripping from the seams in the stone, and that already it was forming little pools on the floor.

"To be drowned like a rat, eh?" he cried, watching the water as it ran down the wall. "Did I come from Arizony for this? No!"

The burning jet showed him how fast the water was forming on the dull stones at his feet. It ran along the track of the car upon which he had been carried into the place after falling from the room to which he had been lured by the false letter.

He had seen water oozing through the rocks of his mine, but never anything like this.

The Arizonian stood and watched the constant dripping for some time. He tried to calculate how long it would take for the cell to be flooded at that rate, and tried to compare it with the two hours he was to live.

Nothing could be heard now but the dropping of the water as it struck the stone, for in some places, instead of running down the wall, it gushed from the seams and fell in little streams, making a noise which, under any other circumstances, would have been musical.

But, to the Man from San Lopez, it was the music of death.

An hour passed away before he felt uncomfortable on account of the water. It was now up to his boot-tops, and he was watching it with the grim nature of a cool man. Wherever he walked the element plashed around him, causing him to notice it all the time.

After awhile it would hide his defiance on the wall, and it, and not the sentence near the light, would be the recorded lie of the cell.

All at once he heard a sound which was not that of falling water.

It came through the wall against which he was leaning and he held his breath.

It seemed to be the sound of a human voice, and he listened with all ears.

The Man from San Lopez did not move.

"What will you give to get out, prisoner?" said the voice, when he had listened a moment.

What would he not give? Ay, what sacrifice would he not make to quit that hell underground where the water of doom was seeping through stone and rising almost to his waist?

He began to doubt the words he had heard, but he quickly answered them.

"Name your own price," he said to the unknown.

There was a brief silence as if two persons were in whispered consultation, and then he heard the same voice again.

"Have you got fifty thousand?"

"I have twice that amount," cried Morte of Arizona.

"We don't want to rob, but we don't want much money."

"Name your price, I say, but for God's sake—"

"What do you want out for?"

Ay, what for?

The never absent thought of vengeance flashed from the man's tongue without effort.

"To get even," he exclaimed.

"With whom?"

"With my enemies."

"Name them."

"I forgot for a moment that one of them is dead, but I had well-nigh forgiven him," he replied. "He was found dead by a detective, but the serpent is alive, and I want to crush her head."

It seemed to him that a laugh came through the stone.

"Where is she?" asked the voice.

"Not beyond reach of the hand from San Lopez."

"You must hate her?"

"I have a right to."

"What did she ever do to you?"

"She robbed me—"

"You can't kill any one for robbery."

"To Hades with your laws!" grated Morte. "I am a law unto myself. Besides, she has killed, and I am my pard's avenger."

The same laugh again.

Meantime the water was rising faster and faster. All four walls were now sweating the direful fluid; it was above his knees, and would soon reach his waist.

"They're only taunting me," said the Man from San Lopez at last. "They are playing me for a fool. I am out of the game when it comes to that," and he kept silence and did not answer the voice when he heard it again.

"You don't want out, do you?" it said. "You talk of vengeance and yet you keep silence when we speak."

No answer.

Then he heard something which was not a voice. It sounded like a blow from a pick and seemed to be at the foot of the wall but on the other side.

It worked steadily for some time and then rested. Morte listened and kept time to the blows in his mind. By and by the water seemed to fall. It went down lower and lower, until his drenched boot-tops were again visible, and at last he caught sight of the floor. The water was escaping faster than it came in, and when he saw that this was so he began to think that the wielder of the pick might be a friend after all.

The two hours were drawing to a close. The allotted time was slipping away, and instead of standing neck deep in the flood, he was out of it entirely; not only this, but a hole had opened at the foot of the wall and the pick was cutting it out every second.

There were two persons beyond the wall, but who were they? Had Sol Sphinx the ferret come to his rescue? Had the keen detective discovered the trail of his insnarers and was he one of those beyond the dungeon?

"Can't you squeeze through now?" said one of the liberators at last.

Morte got down and tried to worm himself through the hole the pick had made, but he was too much of a giant for that.

"You don't know how big I am," said he with a laugh.

He fell back and the pick went to work once more, and in a few minutes he tried it again. This time he was more successful, though only by great effort, and after a long siege of twisting he managed to get through the hole and stood erect in the light of a lantern.

"Jehosaphat!" cried a voice, and two men at the same time fell back from him.

"Are you the man what was in the trap?" cried one.

"I'm that individual."

"What became of the other one?"

"That was no other. I'm the original Morte of San Lopez."

"From San Lopez, eh?"

"Yes."

"And where is that?"

"It is in Arizony—the hardest town with the coolest men in the world."

"Well, all we can say is that we've set free the wrong man; but we won't go back on the job. You were in the trap. By Jove, pal, you ought to give us something for this."

"I will. I'll make you nabobs of New York."

CHAPTER X.

THE FLIGHT OF A TALENT.

MORTE OF SAN LOPEZ stood once more in the open air drinking in the exhilaration of his escape. He had been set free by two men of whom he had never heard and who had had no expectation of releasing him.

These men were shady characters who told him that they were hunting for a friend who had fallen into a trap of some kind—an underground trap, and when they discovered that some one was beyond the wall they were sure they had found their companion.

"When you told us you were from San Lopez we thought Jack had gone crazy," said one of the pair, "and even then we did not suspect that we were letting you out of the trap. We will look again for Jack, an' if we never find him we will have done one man a good job."

The Man from San Lopez went direct to his boarding-house. He went up to his little room with all the caution he could, and found that his things were still there. There were no signs of visitors while he was gone and after awhile he crept down the stairs and went off again.

The city clocks were striking ten when a tall figure went up another flight of steps in another part of the city and opened a door at the top. A grin overspread the man's face as he stepped into a small room and glanced at a figure drawn up on a cot in one corner of the place.

All at once this reclining figure sprang up and stared at him.

"What's your master?" asked the visitor.

"Where did you come from?"

"Never mind that, but, if you want to know, I've just come from the infernal regions; don't I look like it?" and the speaker looked down at his boots and decidedly moist pantaloons.

"Sol will be in directly," said the man on the couch, still staring at the person standing in the middle of the room. "You're the man he's been wondering about."

"And I've been worth wondering about, too," grinned the other.

The Man from San Lopez went to the table and took a seat there. Jilt, Sol Sphinx's Cerberus, left his bed and came and sat down near him.

For some time the two looked at one another without speaking.

"What has he discovered?" asked Morte.

"I don't know. I don't get to help keep any of his secrets."

"You don't eh? Is he looking for me?"

"I think so."

"What will he say when he sees me in his chair—let out of the trap by two underground rats? Ha, who dreamed of this in the mines of Arizony? By heavens, this is romance, but I'll make it something else before the game has been played out."

The Arizonian struck the table with his fist and Jilt fell back with a gasp.

"There's somebody you don't like. I can see that," said he.

The Man from San Lopez only laughed.

The next moment there came up the stair the footsteps of a man.

"He comes," smiled Jilt, bounding from the table and landing upon his bed.

Morte fixed his eyes on the door. When it opened a smile appeared at his half-concealed lips and then a man stopped suddenly and stared at him.

Sol Sphinx, the detective, had come home. He stood at the door a moment gazing at the Man from San Lopez, but all at once he came forward and reached a hand across the table.

Jilt thought it time for him to quit the room, and in a moment the two men—miner and ferret—were the only occupants of the room.

Then Morte began and told all. He went from the drab house on the quiet street to the trap; he told how the floor had given way beneath his feet; how he found himself in a walled tomb with a gas jet burning at one side; how the hand had come out of the wall, as it seemed, and wrote his doom on the stone; how the water seeped through the wall; and, finally, how the two marauders had released him through mistake.

To all this Sol Sphinx listened like a man entranced. He had never heard such a story in all his experience. He knew there were traps in Gotham, but none like that one.

"What is your beard worth to you?" asked the detective at the conclusion of the fascinating narrative.

The Man from San Lopez ran his hand through his treasure.

"Time was when I wouldn't have parted with it for all the gold under ground," he said.

"You must lose it now."

"To-night?"

"Right away. You must not give your hunters another sure pointer. The man with the gold beard must vanish."

"He shall. What have you discovered? Where is the corpse of Quicksilver Dan?"

The detective smiled.

"That is one of the mysteries of the game," he replied. "We don't want the body, do we?"

"No, but—I'd like to know how it got away."

"Time may clear up that mystery; but when your beard has vanished I want to take you somewhere."

Half an hour later a man who did not resemble Morte of Arizony, though he was tall and herculean, like the Westerner, sat in the ferret's room, passing his brawny hand over a face which had just felt the keen edge of the razor.

"Try that," said Sol Sphinx, tossing him a false mustache, which he adjusted with an amused grin.

When he surveyed himself in a glass he burst into a fit of laughter.

"She wouldn't know me if I should go to her house," cried he, turning to Sol.

"Now let us go," and as Jilt came back, the twain went out, leaving the strange man on guard.

The detective led his companion to a certain house which they entered from the sidewalk, and in a moment were standing before Kate Ravelin, the fortune-teller.

The girl stood like a statue while she gazed at the Man from San Lopez, and all at once she looked at the ferret for an explanation.

Kate was pale and trembling, and when the detective told Morte that she had the power of tracing people while in a trance, she seemed to shiver.

But why did the tall man look so sharply at the girl, and why did she begin to turn her eyes from him?

"Let me speak," said the Arizonian at last. "I have seen something in this girl's face that brings back the past to me. Whose child are you?"

Kate Ravelin smiled.

"Unfortunately I cannot answer you," she said. "I am a waif—a waif without a history. There is but one living person who seems to know anything concerning my life, and—"

She stopped and trembled again.

"You know who that person is," she went on, looking at Sol Sphinx.

"The doctor?"

"The Demon Doctor of New York."

"Who is he?" queried Morte.

"What, haven't you told your friend about him?" cried Kate, glancing at the detective.

"There is time enough for that," was the reply. "I have brought Morte of Arizony to you to give me a new clew to the mystery I want to solve. The doctor can come in later on."

The beautiful mystery of Gotham bowed and dropped into her chair, and Sol Sphinx instructed Morte how to proceed to set her on the trail of the jeweled hand which had shown itself to him in the four-sided dungeon.

Whiter than ever grew the face of the girl in the chair. As sound of the man's voice she was seen to start, and the next minute she attempted to speak but the effort was a failure.

"I see the hand, but in a mist, as it were," said Kate Ravelin. "I see it move across an elegant table, but I can't see the face of its owner; that is hidden. You must let me have a little time. I may see more in a moment; the mist may float away."

The two men waited, but the lips did not part again.

"She is under the spell of the Demon Doctor," said the detective, withdrawing Morte's hand from the girl's. "I caught him coming out of this house a few hours ago and when I entered I found Kate on the floor in a deep swoon. At first I thought her dead, but she revived, yet with little knowledge of his visit."

The withdrawal of Morte's hand released the fortune-teller from her trance and her lustrous eyes opened once more.

"I have lost my power forever," said Kate with a deep sigh. "I am no longer one of the mysteries of New York. I can pretend to read the future for fools, but I can not trace people while in a trance. That power is mine no more."

She brushed back her dark hair and smiled wearily at the two men.

"Tell me about this doctor," said Morte.

"I will," cried the girl before the detective could speak. "His name is Jallien; he has French blood in his veins and is as handsome as the sleek tigers you see in the cages. He has claws just like those tigers, but they are hid under the velvet and you never see, but you feel them. I met him a year ago; he had heard of me, and one day he came here and wanted me to try my powers which were then in their prime. I obliged him and he paid me well. By-and-by he came again; he said he was interested in me. He has eyes that seem to charm, and while one is under their spell that one is in his power."

"More than once I wanted to escape this man, but I could not. I became as clay in his hands, and whenever he went away I felt that he had taken something with him. He was destroying my powers as surely as the dropping of water wears away the rock. Last night he came and I was found, as Sol has said, in a swoon after his departure. He carried off the last vestige of my wonderful faculty. I saw the hand in a mist, but that was all. Six months ago I would have seen the wearer of that hand; I could have tracked her through the darkest part of New York, no matter what her disguise might have been; but now—"

The girl stopped with a smile and turned to Sol.

"I am very sorry in one sense and in another I am glad," she went on. "I am tired of this life. I have been robbed of my one talent, and why? Was I hurting Doctor Jallien?"

"Maybe the tiger doctor was afraid you would track him one of these days," broke in the Man from San Lopez.

"That is it! You have struck the nail on the head, Morte. This Demon Doctor of New York was destroying Kate's talent to insure safety to himself. He has played his game with a cool fineness which stamps him a veritable devil."

"Where is he?"

"You shall know soon enough. He was the doctor who visited Quicksilver Dan in the little room in the tenement."

"And the woman who came down the steps with the cat-tread?"

"The one Mrs. Harlow saw?"

"Yes."

"We will find her."

A few minutes later the two men stood on the street with the eyes of a boy fastened on the taller one.

"I'll be Jehued if that don't look like him, but he's lost his beard!" cried the gamin. "And the man with him is the detective who came to our house and tried ter pump me. But all he got out o' Billy Bee he could put in his eye. I half believe that's the man I took from the house by the letter the lady gave me. I wonder if she knows he's out?"

The sharp eyes of Billy Bee, the tenant of the haunted tenement, had recognized the Man from San Lopez despite the loss of his beard, and the longer he looked at him the firmer became this conviction.

He followed the two some distance, and when they turned into a certain street he ran off in another direction.

"She don't know that I have her address," said he with a grin. "But I followed her home since I did the job for her. I didn't tell Sol Sphinx that I saw her face in the carriage when

she handed me the note, because there was more in keeping mum. Now I'll go to her and sell what I've discovered. Here goes for a blooming tip," and the boy broke into a run.

In a little while he appeared in an aristocratic portion of the city, and his dirty hand was jerking a bell alongside a richly-paneled door.

When it was opened Billy Bee squeezed inside, and seeing a light in a room near by, darted into it before he could be caught by the servant.

He appeared like a vision of the gutter to an elegantly-dressed lady in a rich arm-chair, and springing up to her before he could be jerked away by the servant at his heels, he cried:

"What'll you give me to tell you where the man is I gave the letter to? He's at large again, and with his nice beard cut off—"

"Merciful heavens!" broke in the woman, with a face deathly pale. "But you lie, boy; you lie!"

"I don't! What's my eyes for? I saw him not twenty minutes ago," and Sol Sphinx, the sharp, was with him.

There was no answer, and Billy Bee thought the occupant of the chair was on the edge of a swoon.

CHAPTER XI.

SOL SPHINX SCORES A POINT.

THE next morning Sol Sphinx appeared at the door of Dr. Jallien's office.

His ring was promptly answered, and he was ushered into the private room, where he had not been since his last interview with the handsome man, at which he was commissioned to find Pearl Newport, the missing daughter of the absent millionaire.

Dr. Jallien was as suave as ever, and when Sol looked at him he could not help recalling Kate Ravelin's estimate of him.

"I was to report to you concerning my hunt for Miss Newport," said the detective, watching the play of the doctor's countenance.

"Then you have something to report?"

"Not very much, but a little," was the reply, and the ferret spun for the doctor a well-devised story, which he had settled on before ringing the office bell. "I think I shall be able to report better success ere long. When is Parke Newport expected home?"

"Not for two weeks, at least," was the response.

"He has as yet learned nothing of the girl's disappearance?"

"Nothing, thank fortune. His wife has kept him in ignorance, as we expect to have the young lady home when he returns, therefore there will be no shock, and his health will not be endangered."

"Are you sure, doctor, that you have given me all the particulars of the case? Might I not be able to get a new thread or two from Mrs. Newport?"

"She cannot give you anything additional. Besides, she is of a nervous temperament and the visit to the house of a detective might have an unpleasant effect. I am her agent in this unlucky matter and she sanctions all we do."

Thus shut off, the detective was obliged to give up his intention of visiting Mrs. Newport with Dr. Jallien's consent and he went down the steps with a puzzled smile on his face.

"One thing is certain and that is that Pearl Newport is hiding from her step-mother and the Demon Doctor," he said to himself. "She has fled from home for a purpose, and if I could discover why, I might find a clew to another mystery which just now interests another person besides myself."

The sun was mounting through the cold March sky when a man who looked but little like the ferret of Gotham passed up the steps of No. 666 M—, avenue and was admitted by card to the parlor.

A soft glow from the fire in the grate lit up the darkened room and the man who had dropped into a chair was watching the door with the eye of a hawk.

Presently footsteps came toward it and in a moment it had opened to admit the handsome wife of Parke Newport—the woman whose beauty had given her a reputation far beyond the limits of the city. She was tall and graceful, with eyes of liquid darkness, an abundance of lashes and a white, almost transparent skin.

She saw her visitor the moment she opened the door and stopped as if transfixed.

"I ordered that you be admitted after looking at your card," she began, holding the card in her hand and glancing at it as she spoke. "I am at a loss to know why you should visit me, but I suppose you will enlighten me."

It was evident that Mrs. Newport did not dream that the man looking at her was one of the keenest detectives in the city—that her house had been invaded by Sol Sphinx, and that he had come thither for a purpose which, if carried out, might change her whole life.

"I will enlighten you all I can, madame," answered the ferret. "I am from the West. I have been here some months, wearing off the rough edges of mining life. I used to dwell in that land of cactus and gold, Arizona. My life there was not much better than the average man's; but I didn't leave my form in one of the graveyards there, and that is something."

It seemed to Sol that the woman smiled at his last remark, but he may have been mistaken.

"You will pardon me, but I saw you out the other day shopping, and your face appeared so familiar—so like one I used to see in the far West—that I could not resist the temptation to call and tell you so, besides spinning for your gratification, if need be, a story about one of your sex who made herself famous among the mines."

Now there was a change on the face before the detective. The eyes seemed to devour him; all was scrutiny now, and the hands that rested in Mrs. Newport's lap seemed to shut.

"This is all very strange to me," said she with a smile. "I am not used to the customs of the West, having spent my life far from its boundaries, but I am not the person to censure you for the liberties you have taken, seeing that you have not been used to the customs of the East. I shall be pleased to hear the story of the woman who became famous among the mines."

She rose and shut the door which stood slightly ajar, and came back to her chair.

"Did she really resemble me?" she queried, with a light laugh. "I never dreamed that I had a counterpart, much less one who became a heroine where everything is rough and the people belong to the desperate society of the mines."

"Queen Medea, as they called her, looked like you, but there the resemblance ends, of course," said Sol Sphinx. "She was beautiful and graceful of figure, and she came to San Lopez, as the town was called, on a stage. From the first she made friends, and it was not long before from among them all she chose a husband—the homeliest man in camp, but one of the richest. I am telling my story as I have heard it from a hundred pairs of lips, for I saw Medea only twice, but her face has remained with me ever since."

"Queen Medea's husband, Quicksilver Dan, had a partner, a wild fellow with no stability and few friends. He liked cards so well that he gambled away his share of the bonanza, and then had the face to accuse Quicksilver Dan's wife of breaking him up. It was fortunate that the woman left San Lopez when she did, for there is no telling what Morte, the black-leg, would have done, for he swore vengeance to the supreme disgust of the whole camp. I have heard of neither since I came East. I suppose Queen Medea and her husband are somewhere, living the life people usually live in the far West, and that Morte has died with his boots on, and that his bones have been picked by the scavengers of the sky—the vultures of the Western desert."

Not once had the detective's story been interrupted by the woman, who drank in every word. He had never had a better listener, and not a word had escaped her. While he talked, the white hands in her lap crept in and out the folds of her silken gown, and her face remained white and unchangeable to the close.

"So I look like this woman—like Queen Medea of San Lopez?" smiled Mrs. Newport.

"I could not help marking the resemblance when I saw you on the street. If I have insulted you by the comparison, I beg your pardon, but—"

"You have not insulted me," broke in the millionaire's wife. "I am glad you have called. Your story has interested me, and I have listened attentively to the history of Queen Medea. Would you know her if you were to meet her again?"

"I think I would. These women don't change much. The stamp of their reckless life clings to them like a tattoo."

"Aptly said," was the reply. "Was Queen Medea really bad?"

"Not above other adventuresses. There are to-day hundreds of Queen Medeas in that wide scope of wild country. They can shoot and lasso, and their varied accomplishments would shock and at the same time delight the denizens of the cities on the Atlantic seaboard."

"And Morte, the man who wanted vengeance for fancied wrong? What became of him?"

"I have lost sight of the man. He wandered away from San Lopez before I left, and the story of all three is fast becoming a mere tradition there."

"I suppose these mining-camps don't grow much?"

"San Lopez does not at any rate," said the detective. "There seems to be a curse of some kind on the camp. It has lost but little of its toughness, though the railroad has touched it. Cactus Charley still holds forth in the little shop on the corner and Mexican Pete, the dandy of the place—the man who was supposed at one time to be the prospective husband of Queen Medea—he limps around on a crutch."

Intense curiosity, accompanied by a smile, started up in Mrs. Newport's eye.

"You have rendered me curious about these people," said she. "What gave Mexican Pete a chance to go round on crutches?"

"He was caught stealing in the mines and was shot by Galapagos Joe so badly that he lost one limb."

"But it didn't spoil his beauty, did it?"

"Not exactly, but his usefulness is somewhat impaired."

Mrs. Newport laughed.

"Really," said she, "you have given me a pleasant entertainment. It is better than reading a romance of the characters of the West. I am delighted. And so I look like your heroine! How funny and absurd! I am the counterpart of Queen Medea—I, Mrs. Newport of New York. It is the one romance of my life, and I would like to have my husband hear it when he returns from the South."

She looked at the detective, still without a suspicion, and he rose to depart.

"It is very strange to you no doubt that I should take an interest in the subsequent career of this woman who resembles me," she remarked. "You say that she and her husband left San Lopez. Did both go off at once?"

"No, the wife went first. She wearied of Quicksilver Dan and gave him the slip one day."

"And Dan—did he follow?"

"He went off, but not for some time afterward. He said he was going to find his wife and declared that he would chase her round the world but what he was successful."

"And you never heard how successful he was?"

"San Lopez never heard of the couple after that."

Sol Sphinx found the eyes of Mrs. Newport looking him through while he talked. She could not keep away from the subject he had introduced. It seemed to fascinate her and the detective was always willing to talk.

The human ferret was in the hall with his hat in his hand and Mrs. Newport was standing near with another query on her lips.

The bell rung sharply.

In an instant the beautiful woman sprung forward and opened the portal.

"I've caught you at home, have I?" cried a voice whose sound sent a nameless thrill to the ferret's heart and the next moment a man came in.

He stopped in the hall and stared at Sol Sphinx.

It was Dr. Jallien, and his keen black eyes seemed to look the detective through and through.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Newport," said Sol, avoiding the Demon Doctor's gaze and looking at the millionaire's wife.

He was bowed out with a cheery 'good-morning' and heard the door close behind him. But he did not see the scene that followed his sudden exit.

"In God's name, when did that man come here?" cried Dr. Jallien, his womanish hand, soft and silken, clutching Mrs. Newport's wrist and his dark eyes devouring her.

"He came awhile ago, and has been entertaining me with the story of Queen Medea of San Lopez."

"Was that his mission? And you listened?"

"Yes. Why shouldn't I?"

"Didn't you penetrate his disguise?"

"No. I have his card. See."

She extended a small card which bore the name of "Jack Talbot, of Arizona" and the Demon Doctor stared at it and then handed it back with a curse.

"You have lost your wits, woman," he said. "That man should never have been allowed to cross this threshold. He never saw Arizona. What he knows about it and about the history of the people he talked about he got from the man whose hound he is. Your visitor is one of the coolest and best detectives in this country. I have warned you against him more than once."

"My God!" fell from Mrs. Newport's tongue. "First a boy brings news of disaster and now—"

She staggered toward the door unable to complete her sentence, and walking across the room beyond, dropped into a chair as white as the dead.

Dr. Jallien followed and stood over her.

"Go on," said she, looking up. "Tell me that man's name."

"You ought to know from what I have said. Your visitor was no less a person than Sol Sphinx, detective, and the man now in the employ of Morte of San Lopez."

In an instant, a transformed woman, Mrs. Newport was on her feet.

"Now we know what to do!" she cried.

CHAPTER XII.

WINNING TO LOSE.

IF New York had suspected the secret Sol Sphinx carried from the elegant home of Mrs. Newport, New York would have been astonished.

The detective no longer doubted the identity of the millionaire's wife. He believed that he had solved one of the parts of the dark puzzle, for, to be plain, he felt that he had looked into the eyes of Queen Medea of Arizona.

The tigress of San Lopez had changed lairs; she had left her old life behind her and, instead of being the wife of Quicksilver Dan, was the wife of Parke Newport, the nabob.

Hence her desire to know all that her visitor knew concerning her life at San Lopez and something about the other denizens of the Ari-

zonian camp where she had finished her Western romance by running away from the man she had netted.

And Quicksilver Dan had been found dead in one of the dark tenements of Gotham, and little Tressy Harlow and her mother had asserted that the night the miner-hermit died a soft footstep came down the stairs leading from his room.

More than this: Dr. Jallien, the Demon Doctor of the metropolis, the friend of Mrs. Newport, was the miner's physician, and he was skilled in the use of secret drugs; had boasted that he knew that which would have made the Borgias jealous.

It need not be said here that Sol Sphinx put this and that together as he walked from the Newport mansion with the scenes of the past hour fresh in his mind.

He went back to his quarters to tell the Man from San Lopez what he had learned and how he had stood face to face with the hunted woman of the Southwest, but the only tenant of the place whose face greeted him was Jilt, lying as usual on his couch.

Morte was not in just then. He had gone out for a little air, Jilt said, and the detective cursed what he called the man's "lack of judgment."

"He has no idea of the power and cunning of the cabal we are fighting," thought Sol. "He trusts too much in the change produced by the barber's razor. He forgets that it did not alter his eyes nor reduce his figure. He is still Morte in everything, but the golden beard. He must watch his p's and q's, or the next trap will not yield to two roustabout pards whose very names are unknown."

Telling Jilt to bid Morte remain when he should return, Sol went off again and turned up at a house in a quiet portion of the city. He could see the river from the stoop, but it soon faded from view, for he had been admitted and the door was shut.

He did not emerge from this house until after several hours had passed and when he left it he was bowed off by a young girl.

He found that Morte had not returned to the little room presided over by Jilt, and with this perplexing information, he started off again.

Meantime the Man from San Lopez was having an adventure of his own.

About the middle of the day Tressy Harlow, seated at her table with paint brush in hand, was astonished to see the door open and a tall man standing before her.

His face was cleanly shaven, but his eyes had a familiar gleam to the child, and she asked him in a cheery voice to be seated. Her mother had taken some work to their employer and would not be back for some time.

"I won't stay long," said this man. "Which room did Jack Bromley occupy? the one on the next floor?"

"Yes, sir, the room right above us; but it has been rented and the new tenant will be in tomorrow."

The man withdrew and mounted the creaking steps. As he passed up, a door beneath him was opened and a dark, evil-looking face peeped out and sharp eyes watched him.

The Man from San Lopez did not see anything of this, but kept on until he reached the door of the fatal room. He turned the knob, the portal swung open, and he was inside.

"I'll have this hunt all to myself," he mused. "While Sol is paying his respects to the nabob's wife, I will see if Dan left any message besides the one the detective found sewed up in his lapel."

Morte then fell to examining the room which had been divested of every particle of furniture belonging to Quicksilver Dan. The floor had been scrubbed, the walls washed here and there, but a good deal of the grime still remained. He went over the room with the eye of a keen ferret. He looked close, examining every mark that attracted him, but his search promised to end in nothing.

At last he began to sound the walls with his knuckles. He did not strike very hard for fear of arousing the suspicions of other people, but while he rapped he leaned toward the dirty wall and would listen for the indications of a hollow—a concealed door in the plastering.

"Dan had the certificate of his marriage with her when he went off," said Morte. "It wasn't as fine a document as they get up here in this city, but it was good all the same. It was binding and held them fast while both lived. I want that bit of paper. I must have it. If they knew he had it they would be apt to want it, too. But Dan was secretive. He clung to that certificate for he knew its value. I don't think he would sell it. He never had an over supply of money while he lived here. He starved and yet she came to see him. Of course it was his wife—the veiled woman Mrs. Harlow saw on the stairs."

All at once the Man from San Lopez stopped his knuckle-rapping and took out his penknife. He leaned closer than ever to the wall, and inserted the point of the blade into a little crack only visible after the sharpest scrutiny.

A little pressure followed the act and suddenly a piece fell out, revealing a square niche

which seemed empty. Morte thrust his fingers into the place and grasped something folded into a small compass.

"This is what he wouldn't trust on his person," cried the Arizonian. "This is the document that would make the coolest woman in America wince. I have it at last. This is the thing I have dreamed of finding—a thousand times and over. Now I am armed, and I'd like to see another trap catch me!"

Finding nothing else in the hole, he drew off to the window and unfolded the dirt-covered document there.

The hole in the wall stared at him, but he did not care for that.

The paper bore the marks of age, yet it was not very old. It had seen rough usage, had been carried in not very clean receptacles, but the heavy fiber of the paper had preserved it.

It was a marriage-certificate, showing that on a certain date in San Lopez, Arizona, Daniel Dalton and Medea Manton had been made man and wife. The witnesses were rough denizens of the camp from their signatures, and altogether it was an odd-looking document, but as binding as any issued from the more civilized courts of the East.

A smile of satisfaction broadened on Morte's face while he looked at his find.

"It's worth suffering the horrors of imprisonment for," he cried. "I don't care if I was in the shadow of death underground, since I have this document. I don't care if I did see my doom written by a jeweled hand. I have this precious paper. Ah, if they knew it! Wouldn't they scheme for it? What will Sol say? I must go back and show it. By Jove, that's the making of a detective in me, if I do say it myself."

He folded the document at last and placed it in his bosom. Then he closed the secret door in the wall and made it as invisible as ever.

There was triumph in the eyes of the Man from San Lopez now. The eagle had swooped upon a golden prize.

He did not search the room any longer.

What need to?

He crossed it and opened the door. Everything was still outside.

The sun sinking lower had filled the narrow corridor with shadows which were not there when he came; that was the only change.

With the paper where he had hidden it, the Man from San Lopez went down the stair, but he had not proceeded half-way when he became aware that he was followed.

In an instant he turned half-way around and looked back. A man was on one of the upper steps, but he had halted and was eying him like a cat.

"Ho," said Morte. "I hope I haven't disturbed you."

"Not at all, not at all," was the response. "I think I know you, or at least your face is familiar."

While he said this the man came down, cat-like in all his movements.

"Well, I'll swear!" cried the Man from San Lopez. "What are you doing here, Brazos Bill?"

The descending man stopped short and laughed, then put out his hand.

"Hang me if it ain't Morte with his face skinned!" he cried.

The two men stood there on the dirty stair and looked into each other's face. It was a meeting most unexpected, and strange, too, that they who parted in Arizona should come together again in a New York tenement.

"I live in this bee-hive," continued the man called Brazos Bill. "It's not the old camp with the free air, but it's better than the old mines whar we had ter gasp for breath all at once when the shaft got foul."

Morte was still looking at the speaker. In physique they were nearly equal, but Bill had the broader shoulders and there was a dark gleam in the eyes that looked out over the short stubby beard he wore.

"You're in no hurry, Morte?" said he. "We needn't talk on the stair when I have a den within three steps."

"Where is it, Brazos?"

"By George, I like my old name which I haven't heard for years!" exclaimed the newly found pard. "I want to tell you something, Morte—something about another pard who used to be close to you in San Lopez."

He glanced as he spoke toward the room which the miner had just left.

"What about him?"

"Not here whar we might be overheard. The people in this trap have first-class ears. Come to my room. I won't keep you, but if you want to hear what became of Quicksilver Dan you won't neglect this opportunity for I'm going off to-morrow—back to the old life, mebbe."

The following moment the Man from San Lopez was moving back up the steps guided by the man he had met, and in a short time he stood in a room similar to the one he had examined with such care. It was on the floor above that once occupied by Quicksilver Dan, and the

Arizonian could not help observing that the room was directly over his old pard's.

Brazos Bill leaned against a table upon which sat a black cat who eyed Morte with a savageness indicative of danger.

"Black Cactus here is all the pard I have now," grinned Bill, stroking the cat's back. "He's better than some men I know. But about Dan."

"Yes," said Morte, "that's what I want to hear."

"About Dan only?"

"No; I want to know something concerning the serpent who charmed him to my destruction."

Brazos Bill laughed.

"You haven't forgotten Queen Medea, I see," he said. "Well, don't blame you, Morte. Now, if you could find her I presume there'd be a settlement of old scores."

"I know what I know," was the retort.

The countenance of the man leaning against the table underwent a change.

"You know that Dan died in this house," he suddenly said.

"I?"

"You. You have just come down from the room where he died. You have been hunting for something thar."

Morte's answer was a stare. He began to see why he had been cajoled into entering the room in which he stood.

"The thing you looked for you found," continued Brazos Bill. "And I'll take it!"

At the same time from behind the speaker's body came a hand which gripped a cocked revolver and the Man from San Lopez found himself "covered" before he could throw his own quick hand to his hip.

It was done in the droop of an eyelash.

"I want it, Morte," said the man with the six-shooter as coolly as before. "I want what you took from the little pocket in the wall."

"What did I find there?"

"Never mind that. I know and so do you."

The two men stood face to face with ten feet between them, the eyes of one gleaming behind a revolver, those of the other looking into the muzzle or over the short barrel into the face he had not seen for years.

"Come," said Brazos Bill, impatiently. "I want it."

"Are you in her pay?"

No answer.

"You found Queen Medea sooner than I could, Bill. I guess you know how and when Quicksilver died."

"Enough of this. You have the document in your bosom. If it is not produced immediately I will have the pleasure of taking it from a corpse. Quick, throw it at your feet. Surrender the certificate of Quicksilver Dan's marriage."

"It is my trump card and I won't give it up!" came out from between the Arizonian's teeth.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ARIZONIAN'S LOSS.

THE two men stood facing each other in that almost furnitureless room, stood like statues in the dim light that prevailed, their breasts heaving with suppressed excitement, but both looking like human tigers, one with leveled revolver the other at his mercy.

"Don't be a fool, Morte," said Brazos Bill. "Give up what you have in your bosom and save your life. The tide may turn for you one of these days and—"

"I give up nothing," was the quick and resolute reply. "I don't intend to be robbed by a man like you."

It seemed to him that the lips behind the six-shooter met with added firmness, that the eyes of his enemy got a deadlier flash and that the finger at the trigger was crooked a little more.

At that moment a voice came into the room, a voice which caught the attention of both men and held them spell-bound.

"I can't see anything of him, mamma," said the voice which was that of a child. "He came up-stairs for I heard him on the steps and I'm sure I didn't hear him go down."

Both men knew who the speaker was. It was Tressy Harlow, the little feather-painter, and she was looking for the Man from San Lopez.

"Never mind, child; he will call again if he wants to see me," spoke another voice.

It was the mother's tones, and Brazos Bill hoped that the child would go down, but it was not to be.

In another instant a footstep came toward the door, which stood slightly ajar, and Black Cactus, the cat, retreated as it opened and a face appeared.

"I beg your pardon," said the owner of the face, catching sight of Brazos Bill, but not at the same time seeing the revolver. "I am looking for—"

The child stopped abruptly, for she had noticed Morte, but, at the same moment, had seen the six-shooter in the hand of Brazos Bill. She drew back with a shriek, and almost fell from the cramped landing behind her.

"I'm coming, mamma," she called, to her impatient mother. "I have found him, and—and he is about to be killed by the man in No. 29!"

The two men heard every syllable of this, and the effect was startling. The revolver dropped and a mad oath broke over Brazos Bill's lips. Tressy Harlow had spoiled a part of his game; she had come between Morte and death, for to kill him now would be to mark himself to the police on the girl's testimony; yet he wanted the marriage-certificate; it was worth so much to him.

"Why don't you shoot?" said Morte, a grim smile at the corners of his mouth. "I have the document, but the child knows you, it seems, and it didn't take her long to size up the situation."

"Curse the girl!" growled Bill. "The paper you have will never do you a mite of good. It will prove an eternal curse to its holder, and he will live to wish he had never known of its existence."

"I'll take the risk," replied Morte. "You are in her employ. You know where she lives and who she is. Tell her that I have escaped from the water-trap—that I am free to hunt her down, and that I will show her up to the people of this city as Queen Medea of the Mines. More than this: I will make plain the real cause of Quicksilver's death. I will show that she was his wife when he died, no matter what relation she bore to another. That's all."

The Man from San Lopez was at the door glaring with the eyes of a devil at the person in the middle of the room with his broad fingers still clutching the butt of the revolver.

"Take my compliments to her, and tell her this for Morte of Arizony," he continued, and, leaving the door open, he went out and down the stairs, entering Mrs. Harlow's room, where he found Tressy narrating, between gasps, her adventure on the upper floor.

"I'll make you a princess of Gotham one of these days," laughed Morte, taking the child in his arms. "She found me in the nick of time, and I'm not the galoot to forget a thing like that."

Tressy's face crimsoned under his kiss, and when Morte released her he turned to the mother.

"How long has the man in 29 been in this house?" he asked.

Mrs. Harlow became thoughtful.

"He came the same week Jack Bromley did," cried the child.

"Tressy is right. He took rooms here the same week. I think the same day."

"A watch dog," said Morte, half under his breath. "Did the two men appear to be acquainted?"

"I never saw them together, but, then, Jack Bromley did not go out much—very seldom left his room."

"Has No. 29 many visitors?"

"I never saw but one person enter his room."

"And that person—"

"Was a woman."

"Did she look like the veiled one you saw on the stairs one night?"

"She was veiled just like her."

"But she was very pretty," put in the little girl. "I got to see her face only once and that was when I was coming down from Mrs. Turner's room on the top floor. I happened to look down into No. 29 over the transom and there stood a lovely woman talking to the man in the place. She was laughing with him as if she had known him a long time. But when she came out she had the veil over her face, and we did not get to see it any more."

"Did you get into the wrong room to-night?" queried Mrs. Harlow.

"Yes and no," smiled the Man from San Lopez. "I wouldn't have missed getting into that place for a good deal. I have scored a victory, but I have set a new bloodhound upon my heels. But I must go. Good-by. I'll see you later, when I have cleared up some things and paid up the old debts of other days."

Mrs. Harlow followed him to the door.

"He's our friend, Mr. Sphinx, the detective, ever discovered what became of the dead body of the miner-hermit?" she asked.

"He has found out nothing as yet about that mystery; but I think I can set him on the track now."

That was all, and though the widow's face showed that she had still another query in reserve, she did not press it, but saw Morte go down the stairs to the street.

The Man from San Lopez felt his bosom when he reached the narrow sidewalk to see whether the precious document was still his and feeling it he smiled grimly and quickened his gait.

To carry it to Sol Sphinx's room and throw it before the detective was now his desire. He wanted the ferret to know that he could find that which he had overlooked with his sharp eyes, for the bit of dirty paper was enough to wreck a brilliant career and expose one of the coolest women of the day in a deep game of low cunning. He knew that he carried in his bosom that which would cost him his life if he was not careful, that but for the opportune presence of little Tressy Harlow he would not be then on the streets of New York triumphant, but somewhere hid away from human ken, another dead mystery of the metropolis.

Morte, with the aptness of men of his class,

had taken readily to the thoroughfares of the city since coming East. He seemed to have the streets well in his mind, for he darted off, taking a short cut to the detective's room.

He ran up the stairs and stopped for a second at the door. If no one was in but Jilt he would wait for Sol, for he resolved not to trust himself abroad again with the find on his person.

He found the room untenanted. The couch in the corner was tumbled, but Jilt was not there. In all probability the strange creature was at his favorite table in the saloon below, indulging in his tippie, and Morte sat down to wait for some one.

He drew forth the paper and looked at it again. He now studied it in the brilliant light of the gas-jet above him, and all the time his eyes shone like stars for joy and he handled the paper with that care which proved its great value.

A long hour passed away, but the door did not open. Morte looked up a hundred times and expressed his disgust in sundry oaths. He had put up the paper and was drumming on the table.

"I'm thirsty," he cried at last, "but I'm not going down with that paper in my bosom. I'll hide it here somewhere, and when I come back I can get it for Sol's inspection."

He carried out his first thought by rising and hiding the document under the hard mattress of Jilt's couch. He put it as far under as he could reach and drew back well pleased.

A moment later he withdrew, going down to the street and entering a near drinking-place, where he fell in with a man who started a conversation which held him for half an hour.

Morte of Arizona started up all at once and said he must be going.

He went back to the detective's room and strode in.

"Ah, at last!" cried a voice from the table, and it was echoed with interest, for there sat Sol Sphinx, his face showing that the coming of Morte had suddenly relieved him of a great deal of anxiety.

"I don't know what you've found, but I've struck it rich!" exclaimed the Man from San Lopez, throwing a hasty glance toward the couch on which the figure of Jilt was drawn up, and the heavy breathings of the man told that he was oblivious to his surroundings.

"I'm glad of that," answered Sol, "but your appearance pleases me still more. I've met with a little success myself. I have spun for the gratification of a beautiful woman the story of Queen Medea and San Lopez. Never had a better listener."

"What, have you seen her?"

"I have seen Mrs. Estelle Newport."

"Yes, yes. And she wanted to hear your story?"

"She did."

"It was all strange to her, I suppose?"

A broad smile was on the speaker's face.

"She professed never to have heard before of Medea of Arizona. I wish you could have seen her while she listened to me."

"I want to see this woman. I have heard of her—heard again just awhile ago. I have been to No. 233—the tall old shell where we lost a dead man, you recollect."

"What were you looking for there?" cried Sol Sphinx. "Not the body of Quicksilver Dan, I hope?"

"No, for something more important than that. And I found it, too. It took me all over the room which has been made ready for the new tenant, but I didn't let an inch of the walls escape me. I sounded them high and low until I found it."

Sol Sphinx was looking with astonishment upon the man before him.

"How did you know there was anything to find in that room?" he asked.

"I knew Dan had it when he went away, and that it would be the last thing he would part with. I knew that there wasn't money enough in this city to buy it, and that it was too precious to be sewed up in his clothes like the other paper was. I have found his marriage-certificate!"

The Man from San Lopez was bending over the table, his eyes flashing with victory in the light, his dark smooth face aglow with a demon's success.

"No, you did not find that," cried the detective.

"Didn't I?"

"Where was it?"

"It was concealed in the wall of his room. He hid it there and the keen eyes of the watchdog on the next floor—the spy she set at his heels—failed to find it. Ha, ha, I'll beat you after awhile."

"You're beating me now," said Sol good-naturedly. "But where is this important find of yours?"

"Not on my person; I'm too smart to hide it there. I hid it when I went down awhile ago to get a drink. Your baboon yonder is guarding it for me, and he is ignorant of the treasure he is snoring on."

Morte arose with another laugh and went over to Jilt's couch. He ran his arm under the mattress and felt there for a moment. All at once a shade of pallor overspread his face, and

the next moment Jilt was lying in the middle of the room wondering what had happened.

The Man from San Lopez not only pulled the mattress from the couch and was staring at it as it lay in the light, but one by one, with the fury of a tiger, he seized the few bed-clothes, and shook them with violence.

But nothing fell out.

"It has been stolen, and since I put it there," he said at last, turning to the detective. "Here, you white-livered ape, tell me what became of my paper, or—"

He had snatched Jilt from the floor and was choking him with hands that had the grip of vices.

"I'll answer for him," said Sol, springing to Jilt's rescue. "Jilt knows nothing about it. He could not have been here when the theft took place. The paper was taken while you were out. You have been followed."

Morte seemed to gasp for air.

"Followed, and by the hound who had the drop on me to-night!" he exclaimed. "That paper must never reach the Cleopatra of San Lopez."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEMON DOCTOR'S VICTIM.

A plain house on one of the most secluded streets of New York.

A small room softly lighted and in the middle of it a young girl reclining in an arm-chair, her languid eyes half shut and a beautiful though pallid face.

She is quite alone, but her attitude is one of expectancy, for she looks toward the door and every now and then sighs with a sense of weariness.

At last her eyes open wide, displaying a pair of deep-blue orbs, for the door has opened and a young man steps softly into the room.

He throws his hat upon a settee and advances to the girl, who smiles and puts out her hand.

The youth, who is manly looking, takes a seat at her side and for a brief spell their eyes meet without a word from their lips.

"How is it now, Pearl?" says the young man. "Tell me that you feel better—that the new course of treatment is bringing you back to life and that you feel more like yourself again."

"I do feel that way, Marcell. I have felt better ever since I left the roof where I have been sheltered until lately. I am out of the hands of that evil-eyed doctor and that is much."

"That is a great deal. It is salvation!" cries the youth enthusiastically.

"What are they doing now?"

"I don't know. You know they have not let me into their secrets."

"But, haven't they employed a detective?"

"Doctor Jallien has been visited by one."

"But nothing of my disappearance has appeared in the newspapers?"

"Not a word, so far."

"I don't understand it," says the occupant of the chair. "May be they want to keep it all from papa. I cannot think of anything else in connection with their silence about me."

"They have not given your going away the least publicity," is the answer.

The speaker glanced at his watch and marked the time. It was just nine.

A moment later the door-bell rung softly and the youth withdrawing for a minute came back accompanied by a man who had a professional look.

The young girl greeted him with a pleasant smile.

"I feel better at times, doctor," she said, glancing at the young man who was looking on with anxiety traceable on every line of his countenance. "I want to live, and we look to you for the elixir of life. We have a secret which we have been keeping from you and I have determined, without consulting Marcell here, to disclose it."

The doctor had taken a seat at the chair and was holding the almost transparent wrist in his hand.

"I leave all to you," he said. "But I have felt the necessity of knowing more about my patient and her case than I have been told. It is important that I should know, for, as it is, I am fighting a strange malady in the dark."

"In the dark you shall fight it no longer, Doctor Spray," said the fair patient, looking once more at the young man standing at the head of the chair nodding assent which encouraged her.

"I am the only child of Parke Newport," she went on. "A few nights ago I disappeared from home, since when they have had no trace of me. It is as though the river had received me and swept me out to sea. Why did I run off? You shall hear all, doctor. Three years ago my father, a widower at the time, became enamored of a woman who had beauty of a dangerous sort to commend her. Where she came from I do not know, but underneath her disguise—I know she wears one—is the true person which is quite unlike the one she keeps before my father. She called herself Estelle Romaine; she said she was the child of a rich man who was lost at sea when she was a babe, and my father believes her. But in her room—I saw it once when she thought I was not near—a dagger which has a handle of

quartz, and in the top of the handle, set in gold, are the letters 'Q. M.'

"I am my father's main heir. When he married Estelle Romaine he settled upon her a certain portion of his wealth, but the will afterward drawn up gives it all to her in case of my death before hers. You see that I am in somebody's road," and the speaker smiled once more.

"Six months ago I was seized with a sudden cold and the man who is the bane of my life crossed our threshold for the first time. He came at my step-mother's call, and then I looked for the first time in my life into the face Doctor Jallien. He prescribed for me, and for a time I grew better; but there seemed to have been infused into my veins something which was not there before. I cannot describe it. I only know that from the time of that man's coming to our house I began to go down. You see me now, and you have visited me ever since I came here, for let it be no secret to you that I fled from home at the request of Marcil here, and to escape death at the hands of some one. Do you know this Doctor Jallien?"

"I have heard of the man," was the reply. "He is of French origin."

"He has in his body the blood of the serpent which is cold. He has eyes that weave a spell; they charm like the orbs of the snake, and I have dropped asleep under their influence. Doctor Jallien and Estelle Newport know not where I am. They don't know that I have a friend named Marcil; but, strangest of all, they have not openly proclaimed my absence. What they do they do in secret. Marcil has discovered that the doctor has been visited by a detective, that he has employed this bloodhound to find me—to get me back into their power before my father returns from the South. You can guess why."

The young girl ceased and for some time the doctor looked at her in silence.

"I can now fight the disease with some degree of hope," said he. "No longer will I grope in the dark. Can you spare your friend awhile?"

"If it be for our mutual good I can."

The youth stooped over the chair and imprinted a kiss on the white brow of the patient, and the next moment he and the doctor were on the sidewalk.

"Who is this detective who called upon Doctor Jallien?" asked Dr. Spray.

"Sol Sphinx."

"I know him," was the quick response. "If he has not discovered a clue to Miss Pearl's whereabouts you have played your game very well. But he should know."

In an instant Marcil Poynter was staring at the doctor.

"That would be equivalent to giving Pearl back to the cabal," he cried.

"It would not. I know Sol Sphinx, I say. He must know this; he must know the whole plot against the girl. We need him, boy."

A revelation seemed to break in upon the youth's mind.

"I trust you in everything," said he. "The detective shall know it to-night."

In a little while the twain entered a house and Dr. Spray was at home once more.

"What about Pearl now?" eagerly asked the youth.

"I have hopes. Let me say no more. I now know whom I have to baffle."

"Then you did not answer Pearl fully when she inquired if you knew Claude Jallien?"

"I dared not answer her," was the reply.

"There are times when we doctors should keep silence and that was one of them. What, tell her in her present state of health that I knew Doctor Jallien? It would not do, boy."

Marcil fell back in his chair and looked at the doctor whose face was a study.

"Ten years ago there escaped from one of the prisons of France a man who was the most learned of all the chemists of the empire. He disappeared at once and for years all trace of him was lost. The nation who knew something of his crimes wondered why he was not hunted down by the detectives of France, but it came out that he was protected by no less a personage than the emperor himself. This man, who should have felt the knife of the guillotine, came to this country, but not under the name he had borne in Europe."

"And you have known that he was here?"

"Among our profession it is not a secret, though few of us know just where he is located, and under what names he sails. I am one of the fortunate few. I know exactly where this doctor is, but Pearl let out one secret which I did not know."

"That he was her doctor?"

"Exactly. I did not know this before to-night, but if the secret had been kept from me much longer I might have suspected—when it would have been too late."

Dr. Spray opened a bookcase within reach, and took down a lot of French medical journals. Selecting one from the lot he tossed it toward his friend and said:

"Page 97, I think. You read French?"

In a moment the eyes of the young man were at the page designated, and in another second he was interested.

"You have found it?" resumed the doctor.

"You will find there a description of the man

who escaped from prison with the connivance of the authorities, and, it is believed, by the orders of the emperor. If the description fits any one you know, tell me."

"It fits Doctor Jallien! There is the little mark above the mouth. His smile brings it out, just as this description says. With all his knowledge of chemistry he cannot obliterate it."

"That mark seems to baffle his powers, if he has ever attacked it. You are reading a description of the man who escaped, and that man has brought Pearl to the edge of the grave by the administration of medicine whose powers and workings he alone is familiar."

"Do you mean, too, that he alone holds the antidote?" cried the youth.

"That is to be tried. You know, Marcil, that the bite of the cobra is death—that no human skill can ward off the grim monster when he comes to the unlucky person in the shape of the hooded serpent's fangs."

"I will keep nothing back from you," continued the doctor. "I say that, as yet, I do not know aught of the composition of the drug which is sapping the very life of the woman you love; but I want to show you another article."

Dr. Spray took another book from the shelf, and opened it at a certain place.

Marcil had no color in his face now, and his eyes were following the hands of the man in whom he trusted.

"Doctor Jallien has been everywhere. After his escape he went to India; he became a student of poisons there, and carried on his research in the palace of a rajah. This article on the poison of the cobra came from a chemist in India. It is a notorious fact, which did not come out until the article had attracted the attention of the whole medical world, that its author was the infamous Doctor Duroc, alias Claude Jallien. The author claims to have discovered the true analysis of the cobra's poison, that he can manufacture it out of certain chemicals, and gauge its effect on the human system."

"Do you believe him?"

"I dare not question the learning of a man like Claude Jallien."

"But he says here that he has the antidote for the poison he can make, though he admits that the naked venom of the serpent has none."

"That is true."

"Then, if Pearl has this venom in her system, there is an antidote, and it is in the hands of this monster of New York."

"And the friend of the beautiful Estelle Newport?"

The book nearly dropped from the young man's hands, and he sat for a moment like a person stunned.

"There may be some speculation with us," continued Dr. Spray.

"I fear it is too true."

"We must face the worst aspect of this case. We must go on the theory that the venom mentioned by the writer of the article you have just read is in Pearl's veins."

"And that means death?"

There was no answer.

"You do not speak, doctor," cried Marcil.

"You sit there and never answer me. By your silence you admit that you cannot cope with the devilish learning of this Demon Doctor. I will do it myself. I will tear from him his secret—force him to surrender his antidote, or by heavens! he will never finish his game."

"You must attempt nothing of the kind," said the doctor firmly.

"But your skill is at fault. The secret of Pearl's salvation is locked up in the laboratory of the fiend who, guided by the hand of a beautiful woman, is killing her."

"True. You—we—must go to the man he has employed to find his lost patient. I stand sponsor for him."

"For the detective?"

"For Sol Sphinx, the human ferret."

"Then I go to him at once!" and Marcil sprang up and crossed the room.

Doctor Spray gave the youth Sol Sphinx's address and the next moment the little office held no one but himself.

CHAPTER XV.

TWO TRAILS COME TOGETHER.

THE Man from San Lopez had been unnerved by the theft of the document which he had concealed for a few minutes under Jilt's bed. It had completely vanished and he could suspect but one person and he Brazos Bill who was undoubtedly in Queen Meden's service.

Morte was still cursing his old comrade and threatening the direst vengeance when steps came up the stair, and the following moment the door opened and Marcil Poynter stood before the surprised group.

He had come direct from Dr. Spray's, but had not calculated on a confrontation by such a looking man as the Arizonian, hence the stare he gave him after a glance at the detective.

The Man from San Lopez turned full upon the youth and looked at him searchingly, as if he would extract from him some information concerning the stolen prize.

"Are you Sol Sphinx?" asked Marcil, advancing and addressing the ferret.

"I am he," was the answer.

"My name is Poynter—Marcil Poynter and I came from Doctor Spray."

"I know the doctor. And he sent you?"

"Yes, sir," and here the young man stopped, for he did not like the look of the Arizonian, nor the eyes of Jilt which were regarding him with suspicion.

Eager to state his errand, he leaned over the table and dropped his voice almost to a whisper.

"We want your services. It is a case of life and death," he continued. "It involves the safety of a young lady, and I was to tell you the whole story."

The sharp ears of the Man from San Lopez had caught these words. He stepped forward, his boots ringing heavily on the floor.

"Mr. Sphinx is in my employ just now," said he, laying his big hand upon Marcil's shoulder.

"In yours, sir?" was the reply. "Is your case one of life and death? Does it involve the health of a young lady who is in the hands of a poisoning fiend?"

Monte's hand fell off.

"I've just lost something nearly as important as life itself," he said. "It was stolen in this very room and I want to find it—I don't care what takes place elsewhere."

"Oh, you don't eh? You don't care if the young lady to whom I have referred dies at the hands of the Demon Doctor of this city? You want to find a trifle while her life ebbs away. If this be true you haven't a spark of feeling in your bosom."

Marcil had straightened and was standing before the giant with his eyes on fire and his face white with indignation.

"Haven't I?" cried the Arizonian. "Young man, you shall live to change your opinion. Hear him, Sol. I'll go down and get some fresh air and think about the cool theft of the document," and he trumped out of the room, but not until he had touched his hat to the youth.

Marcil watched his departure with a smile.

"Do you have many such clients?" he asked.

"No. They are rare here in New York, though I suppose they would make life a burden in the Far West. But that man has a grievance. He is one of the cool characters of the great land beyond the Mississippi. There's a woman in his case, just as you intimate that there is one in yours. And so long as Morte of San Lopez is in the drama the life of the woman isn't safe."

Marcil heard the detective through and then said:

"You are serving Doctor Jallien are you not?"

A smile came to Sol Sphinx's lips.

"I thought you were going to tell me your story?" said he.

"I will. I know in whose service you are—that you have received a commission from this Demon Doctor. I am here in the interests of Pearl Newport."

"The lost daughter of the millionaire?"

"The same. I have just come from her."

Sol Sphinx showed his astonishment.

"Then," said he, "you have known all the time where she has been since her disappearance?"

"I have known. I planned the flight. I helped her off; I took her out of the jaws of death, and now we are trying to bring her out of the dark shadow—out of the deadly machinations of the man in whose service you are."

"Doctor Jallien?"

"The Frenchman whose body bears the ineffaceable mark of the prison. You will listen to me now, won't you?"

"Go on."

Marcil did proceed. He talked steadily for ten minutes, at the end of which time Sol Sphinx, moving his hand across the table until it touched that of the young man's, said, looking him in the eye:

"You have brought two trails together to-night."

"Then I have helped you?"

"You have. As I have said, you have brought two trails together. You have assisted the man who just left us. You simplify matters considerably; in other words you have given me a clue to a crime which I was sure was being committed, but which I could not track without assistance of the sort you have brought me."

"I am glad of this. I see now that Doctor Spray did not overrate you."

"Jilt?"

The bundle of humanity on the couch in the corner sprang up and waited for orders.

"Go down and find Morte. Bring him up here at once."

Jilt grinned and departed.

In a few moments heavy steps were heard on the stairs and the Man from San Lopez made his appearance.

"Did you find him?" smiled the detective.

"No. I'd have something on my hands if I had," was the quick retort.

"Captain Morte, I want you to hear a story. I have told you about the missing heiress Pearl Newport. Now listen to this young man."

Thus referred to, Marcil retold the story the detective had just heard, the man from the

Southwest listening with all ears, with now and then a shadow of madness settling over his face.

"That is our doctor, sure enough," he exclaimed, looking at Sol. "He must not recover his grip on that young girl. He must lose it entirely. He must give up the antidote. It belongs to him. Do you think," and Morte shoved one of his hands into the light and looked at it proudly, "do you think I could do it with this?"

"What do you mean?" cried Sol.

"Do you think I could choke it out of the scoundrel with this hand?"

"No. A man like Doctor Jallien gives up no secrets for brute force."

Morte fell back.

"Then I'd like to know how you're going to get it," said he. "You don't intend to arrest him?"

"Not for the world. That would interfere with your game. Doctor Jallien must lose his secret. The safety of Pearl Newport demands this."

"But how shall he lose it? I have just lost my trump card. It may be on the road to the beautiful viper of the mines ere this. Jove, it burns my blood to think of it!"

Marte was looking at the speaker who stood in the middle of the room with his hands clinched and his broad chest heaving heavily.

"You look at me, young man," cried Morte. "You have yet to know who I am. I have felt the grip of the secret cabal with which we are convinced this Demon Doctor is connected. I have seen a human hand write my death-warrant on a stone wall, and in the light of an underground jet. I have stood in water watching it rise higher and higher, until I should be overwhelmed. And why? All because I know the past of a certain woman—because I came to New York to find her and my pard, Quicksilver Dan. I found Dan dead—no, that man yonder found him, but I know that Dan was dead and cold—the victim of the great conspiracy to take every obstruction out of her way. I came here to-night with the trump in my hand. I held the death-card against that creature. I hid it in your bed until Sol should come back, but when I went to get it it was gone—stolen by the spy of the Cleopatra in the case, and now it may be in her hands and in the flame of the gas."

"I hope not," said Martil.

"Of course you do, but that don't help matters," was the quick response. "I must have back that document. By the heavens that bend above us, I will have it, or—"

He sprung to the table, and his big hand came down upon it with terrible emphasis.

"I will have it or lose the life I brought from the mines on my hunt for vengeance!"

The Man from San Lopez was permitted to have his mad spell out, and then, telling Sol that he would go back to his lodgings, he slipped out of the office and his boots made the usual noise on the stair.

"A strange man," smiled the detective.

"He wants to find and get even with a woman who robbed him years ago in the West. She is here in New York. There is no longer a single doubt of this. Not only this, but you have heard from her."

"I?" exclaimed Martil.

"Yes; but let us go down. Do you have to go back to Doctor Spray?"

"No."

They left the room and went down upon the street.

"Have you ever visited Doctor Jallien?" asked the detective.

"I never have; but for heaven's sake don't send me thither. I could not trust myself in his presence. I know what he is and what he has done. I should force from him the secret he keeps."

"And probably lose your life and gain nothing."

"Doubtless. But you must go to Doctor Jallien's."

"I dare not."

"Very well, then. I will go."

The cool manner in which the last words were spoken startled Martil.

"I will make my first play for you to-night," continued the detective. "I may bring down two birds with one stone."

"But the letter or document which disappeared from your room to-night? The Arizonian fears that it has ere this fallen into the hands of the woman he calls Queen Medea."

"I don't think it is there yet," was the reply.

"I will take that risk. Doctor Jallien's first."

"If he should suspect you of fighting for Miss Pearl's life—"

"Then I will have to look out," smiled Sol. "The cabal is not very numerous, but it is strong and desperate."

On the next corner the two separated, and for a moment the young man looked back at the vanishing figure of the detective, wondering if he had really found an ally. He knew that Sol Sphinx had accepted a commission from the Demon Doctor, that he had been looking for Pearl, and that if he found her, he was to receive pay from the very people who were deliberately taking her life.

And he had told this man—this city ferret—where she was. He had revealed all he knew

about the Demon Doctor, and if Sol Sphinx was so disposed he could make certain the designs of the plotters.

"I'll trust him," said Martil to himself after a minute's thought. "I cannot do otherwise now. If he betrays me, I may imbibesome of Morte's hatred and turn lion, too."

Meantime Sol Sphinx the ferret had disappeared, and was on his way to Dr. Jallien's office. In a few minutes he ran up the steps and jerked the bell.

The door was not opened for a moment, and then he heard the tread of Mazie in the hall.

"Doctor Jallien?" said the detective.

"Engaged, but come in and wait," was the reply, and the following moment the detective of Gotham was filling a chair in the reception-room.

For some time he sat there in a dim light, which rendered objects not very visible about him. The air was heavy and warm, and he soon became aware that he was the only occupant of the room.

But in a short time he heard the subdued hum of voices, and in an instant he was on his feet, leaning most eagerly toward the point from which they came.

That one was the voice of a woman he did not doubt, and the other that of Dr. Jallien. They were in the next room, which was separated from him by a door, which he felt like breaking open and suddenly confronting the speakers.

All at once the voices became louder. The door-knob turned.

That instant the detective drew back, and wished that the room was dark, but it was too late.

The door had been opened, and he found himself face to face with two persons.

"Make no mistake, doctor," said the woman. "To you all giants are as pigmies and—"

She did not finish her sentence, for she had caught sight of the man in the chair, and, spite of the light that prevailed, had recognized him.

At the same time Sol Sphinx arose and said: "I beg your pardon, madam, but I was waiting here for the doctor, and—"

"That is the same man!" interrupted Estelle Newport. "Why not kill him now?"

CHAPTER XVI.

SOL SPHINX UNDER THE SPELL.

SOL SPHINX looked calmly into the face of the beautiful woman, the wife of the millionaire and Pearl Newport's step-mother.

She stood in the middle of the room, covering him with outstretched hand, every sign of color driven from her face by her sudden discovery, and her whole frame trembling with rage and excitement.

"That is the man who forced himself into my house to tell me the vulgar history of the woman he called Medea," she went on. "He is playing a game against me. He is no better than the characters whom he introduced into his narrative. He calls himself a detective, but—"

Here the hand of Dr. Jallien, sinking into her arm, broke her tirade and destroyed the very sentence the cool ferret wanted so much to hear.

"You may have been mistaken in the man," said the Demon Doctor. "I know this gentleman. He comes often to see me."

"What, do you deny that he is the man who came to my house?"

"I know that he is at this very time in my employ, and that he is trying to ferret out a mystery which, when ferreted out, will be of great benefit to you."

Mrs. Newport seemed to cool down.

"If this be true, I beg his pardon," said she. "But the eyes before me are the same as those into which I looked while listening to the story of Queen Medea. Did you ever hear of such a woman?"

"I have heard of a great many women with histories in my time," answered Sol Sphinx.

"Were you ever in my house?"

"Madam, you forget that you haven't even told me your name."

This seemed to nonplus the woman before him. She recoiled at thought of revealing herself to the man who was looking at her with such strange curiosity.

"Never mind that," she said. "If I have made a mistake let it pass. I must go, doctor."

She was led from the room by the Demon Doctor, on whose face was a queer smile, and when at the door which the detective could not see, she caught his wrist and cried:

"That is the same man?"

"The same man," was the answer.

"He is the one great obstacle in the way now. He serves the Man from San Lopez—that tiger which has escaped. You must not forget this."

"When did I ever forget anything?"

"He won't serve you. He will help this man-tiger from the camps, and will not try to find Pearl."

"I begin to believe this now."

"Then—"

"If you cannot trust me you should look out for another friend," was the interruption.

"I trust you, and for Heaven's sake don't fail!"

The reply was a whisper, but it brightened the eyes of the woman who heard it:

"I never fail!"

The door opened and shut and Mrs. Newport was gone.

In a little while Sol Sphinx heard the footsteps of Dr. Jallien coming back and in a moment the smiling face of the man appeared at the door.

"This way," said he and Sol crossing the room entered the office which was not strange to him as he had been there before.

"What you have just witnessed shows how liable we are to be mistaken," blandly continued the Demon Doctor. "My patient is subject to hallucination and sees strange faces in many places. This is not the first time she has committed a similar blunder. She is the wife of a well-to-do citizen and I am trying to rid her of her malady."

The detective did not appear to study the doctor while he spoke, but he was looking at him all the time and trying to fathom the deep duplicity which he was capable of enacting.

"How strange that she should take you for an imaginary visitor," Dr. Jallien went on.

"Don't you think she ever had such a caller?"

"It is very doubtful."

"But the story about Medea?"

"Patients of her kind get strange ideas," laughed Dr. Jallien.

"You have some time on your hands, or have you something to report?"

"I think I have a clew to the whereabouts of the missing girl."

"Ah. That will be worth listening to."

"I begin to believe that she went off at the instigation of a lover."

A change came over the face of the doctor.

"We have never thought of this," he said.

"Mrs. Newport has repeatedly told me that Miss Pearl never had a lover. She has been a house flower."

"Not all her life?"

"No, she was out of doors enough before her disease manifested its presence in her system. But the lover theory! What inclines you to it?"

Sol answered adroitly, but the doctor shook his head.

"We are now convinced that the young lady was abducted for ransom and that, discovering that her father is not in the city, she will be held till he comes back."

"Why not telegraph for him?"

"That would start his old trouble. A telegram, however well worded, is always a shock. We have been trying to avoid this. But let me show you exactly how my patient is affected. I am an enthusiast when my profession lies before me. Come up to the laboratory."

Sol Sphinx seemed to feel an unseen hand at his wrist. He was under the roof of this escaped prison-bird—the man who had astonished Europe with his learning and crimes, Martil had said that the mark of the prison was on his body, that he had written a treatise on the poison of the cobra—that he even claimed that he could duplicate it, making it less speedy in effects, but just as terrible, only that he could make, too, the antidote that would render its workings of no avail.

This was the man who had invited him into his laboratory—the room which held his secrets, where he made the elixirs of life and the agents of death.

Should he go?

"It is at the top of the house, and you have time on your hands," resumed the suave doctor. "You are in my employ and I want to show you a few things that may be of use to you hereafter."

"I'm always ready to learn," was the reply, and the following second the detective of New York was treading the carpeted steps at Dr. Jallien's heels.

There was no sign of triumph in the Demon Doctor's eyes. His handsome countenance was as imperturbable as ever, but all the same he might be leading Sol Sphinx to a death which had no counterpart in mystery.

Dr. Jallien threw open the door leading into the laboratory, where we saw Mazie take too much of the powerful drug, and pointed his companion to a chair which stood near the work-bench.

Leaning against the bench himself he launched into a history of hallucination, which he seemed to know in all its details; but all at once he bent over the bench and opened the little cupboard which Mazie had tampered with.

Sol Sphinx had resolved to be on his guard at all times. He had determined to thwart any villainy at its threshold, and when he saw the little door open he made ready for a spring.

Dr. Jallien, as cool as ever, took from the cupboard a tiny vial, bluish in color, and held it between his eye and the light.

"Here is the greatest foe hallucination has," said he. "This little vial contains that which meets and conquers the enemy on his own ground."

He was looking over the vial at the detective, and for the first time Sol became aware of the presence of a power which was taking subtle possession of his mind. He thought of

the charges made against this very man by Kate Ravelin, the fortune-teller; the girl had declared that Dr. Jallien had the power to charm one—that he could render a person as harmless in his presence as a fly.

The doctor's eyes were fixed upon him and he could not remove his gaze from the face above him. It was something terrible.

But for all this the detective could think.

"This is the beginning of the Demon Doctor's work," thought he. "I am in the grip of his devilish power. I can't move; my tongue is fixed against the roof of my mouth. What a handsome face Doctor Jallien has. What eyes!"

For a moment longer the serpent eyes of the doctor remained fastened upon the detective, and Sol heard him say:

"You can't leave your chair."

"Yes, I can," thought the ferret. "You think you have mesmerized me, but you have not. Others have failed and I will convince you that you cannot succeed here."

He seemed to make an effort to rise, but could not.

"I told you so," said a voice.

It was not mesmerism, for Sol Sphinx retained the power of reason and thought.

He could see the doctor standing against the bench looking at him, with a smile on his face. But all the same, he was in the Demon Doctor's power.

Presently the hand of Dr. Jallien reached over the bench and found a writing pad which he extended to the detective. Along with it he handed him a pencil.

"I am going to illustrate something about hallucination and show it to you when you are yourself again."

"I won't obey him," thought Sol.

But he took the pad and pencil and waited for the voice again.

"Where is the young lady? Where is Miss Newport?"

Sol Sphinx's hand moved toward the pad and the point of the pencil touched the paper.

"I won't do this," he said mentally. "What this Devil Doctor wants is to rob me of my secret—the one given me by Marcil Poynter. I won't tell him."

"Write me down her address," continued Dr. Jallien. "The paper is before you."

Sol Sphinx began to write. His fingers moved slowly over the pad, and when they stopped there was before him the secret which Marcil and Dr. Spray had kept with such diligence.

He had been robbed of a secret as great as that lost by the Man from San Lopez; he had betrayed Dr. Jallien's beautiful patient back into the coils. He knew what he had done, such was the strangeness of the power possessed by the doctor; but he could not resist it.

"That is good," said the hypnotist. "You have done well. Now, where is Morte?"

Again Sol thought he would not write another word; but the eyes fixed upon him seemed to possess the power of a hundred hands and he wrote the desired information.

Then the hand of Dr. Jallien came down and took the pad from his grasp. He let it slip away without resistance, saw it pass into the villain's hands, and was hidden somewhere behind him.

All at once the eyes before him seemed to move. The light in them changed.

Sol Sphinx came out of the strange trance and was himself once more. But he felt that he had been tampered with for a part of his visit to the laboratory seemed a blank.

"We'll go down now," said the doctor. "You want to go back to the trail, and I am anxious to have you follow up any clue you may obtain. Mrs. Newport is very much depressed over Pearl's absence and has commissioned me to say that, when successful, you may draw on her in any amount."

The detective did not stir.

He had been robbed of something—robbed by the man before him, Queen Medea's partner in the cool plot for a million.

He thought of nothing else now, and with this burning in his brain, he suddenly sprang up.

"Let this piece of infamy stop right here," he cried. "You have in some manner placed me under a spell. You have taken from me a secret which I was to guard. Doctor Duroc, in return for your success you must give into my hands before I quit this room the antidote for the deadly drug you discovered in the land of the cobra."

The Demon Doctor of New York had fallen back at mention of the name which until then had passed no lips but his under that roof.

Dr. Duroc! What memories it seemed to bring up. He became livid, then white, and tried to turn toward the open cupboard in the wall when the hand of Sol Sphinx clutched his wrist.

"Quick, the antidote!" cried the ferret. "I know all the workings of the plot against the girl and the two men from San Lopez. One of them is dead, but the other lives, though doomed. What, are you going to refuse me?"

There was no answer, nothing but a sudden flash in the doctor's eye, which died as suddenly as it came, and Sol Sphinx felt him falling from him.

The next moment Dr. Jallien lay at his feet to all appearances dead!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHAIN COMPLETE.

"GREAT heavens, the man is dead," cried the detective bending over the body on the floor with the light of the gas falling upon the upturned face.

He felt the pulse, but there was not the least flutter there. He put his hand over the heart, but that organ could not be felt.

"Surely this can be no hocus-pocus," he went on. "The Demon Doctor is beyond the help of his secret drugs and we are left in the dark as to the antidote which alone can save Pearl Newport to her million and Marcil."

He rose and looked into the little cupboard. Its little bottles seemed to invite him.

"Doctor Spray is a fine chemist," thought he. "He can analyze anything and tell what it is in all its parts. The elixir of life may be here."

He leaned over the bench and looked at the vials.

"Which one of all these holds the foe of the poison?" he cried. "It must be here if what Marcil told me is true. I came hither to-night to play a game against this infamous doctor—to throw down a card for this fair young girl who has been in his power. Am I to fail?"

He reached over the bench and took three vials from the shelves.

"I must take blindly, hoping that Heaven will direct my hand," he muttered, secreting the vials in his pocket. "Doctor Spray will do his part. I hope I have done more than mine."

With this he stepped around the form on the floor and stole from the room. He went down the stair, two steps at a time, passed through the chamber where Mrs. Newport had discovered him, opened the door and slipped out into the street.

He had encountered no one; he doubted if the house at the time held any person but the silent tenant of the laboratory, and he had one secret which, as a detective, he would not report on Mulberry street.

Drawing low his hat, and buttoning his coat to the chin, the New York ferret flitted from lamp to lamp, but kept in the shadow as much as possible, and at last reached the door of a house alongside of which hung a doctor's sign.

He did not ring the bell but turned the knob and went in.

A light was burning in the hall and he passed down to the first door which he opened and entered a doctor's office.

"Ah, Sol, my boy," cried a voice. "I have been hoping you would come from what Marcil told me of his interview."

The speaker was Dr. Spray, and in a moment the ferret was in a chair before him.

"I have just come from the lair of the Indian serpent," said he. "I have robbed it, but before you listen to my story look at these."

The three vials were deposited one by one before Dr. Spray whose face already wore a look of triumph, and his hand picked up the nearest one and held it near the lamp.

"Which is the one we want?" he asked.

"That is the puzzle; that is for your skill," was the reply.

"What, didn't he tell you which one holds the elixir of life and health for my beautiful patient?"

"Dead men can't disclose secrets."

The look of Dr. Spray became a stare.

"Who is dead? Not the Demon Doctor of New York?"

"Claude Jallien, alias Doctor Duroc, will concoct no more poisons."

Sol Sphinx spoke with so much positiveness that the man before him fell back with a start.

"Heavens, did he resist, and you—"

"I did not strike him, though there is no telling what might have happened if all of a sudden he had not dropped dead at my feet. The villain had robbed me—"

"Of what?"

"That is another mystery. I am sure I was under the spell of his power in his laboratory. When I came out of it I felt like a person who has been plundered while asleep; but I missed nothing."

"If you did not tell it all this would seem incredible," said Dr. Spray. "You had to select for yourself from among his wonderful treasures?" and his eyes wandered to the three vials.

"That is it exactly. I took three bottles, praying that Heaven would guide my hand."

"And I hope it did. I will look into these bottles. I cannot bring to it the peculiar skill Doctor Jallien possessed. A man knows his own work best. But we may get beyond the door of that mysterious house at last."

"Because he is dead?"

"Yes."

The detective was about to speak again, but suddenly refrained.

An idea that seemed to paralyze speech held back his sentence.

"Did you stop to examine the doctor?" asked Spray.

"I felt both pulse and heart."

"And both were still?"

"I could feel no movement."

"You saw no one else in the house when you left it?"

"I got away without molestation."

"But he had servants?"

"Yes, and a young man called Danton—he has been at my heels—and a maid. The latter admitted me."

"The laboratory may be forbidden ground to both," remarked Dr. Spray. "If this be so, the death may remain undiscovered for hours. We must wait until then; but now let me go to work."

Sol Sphinx stood once more on the pavements of Gotham. His heart beat with a wild flutter of triumph, but he could not forget the man he had left for dead on another street.

What would Estelle Newport do when she should learn that her friend, her co-plotter, the Demon Doctor of New York, had stepped out of the game?

Would she play it out? Would she still try to entrap the Man from San Lopez, or would she flee and abandon everything to them?

He walked back toward his abode. Jilt lay on the cot in the corner fast asleep, and when he tried to rouse him the strange being did not open his eyes. This had never happened before.

"This man has been touched," he exclaimed, and dragging Jilt from bed he dashed some water in his face and at last succeeded in bringing him to.

But Jilt knew nothing. He had fallen asleep and that was all.

"What did you drink before going to bed?" queried the detective.

Jilt grinned. He had never lied to his master.

"I took some of the same tippie," he smiled.

"Alone?"

"No, sir. I found a man in the saloon and we had it together."

"What sort of looking man was this?"

"He was tall and dark of skin."

"Young?"

"No, nor very old, either; but he had a nice eye in his head."

"What did he talk about?"

"He asked me, for one thing, if I thought of surrendering my place."

"Did he want it?"

"He didn't say. But he talked a good deal of nonsense."

"Till he had you drugged, eh?"

No answer.

Jilt had not so far recovered from his stupor as to be able to give Sol an exact description of the man, and the detective said:

"I have seen him before."

"Ah, you know him, then?" cried Jilt.

"I may answer you some other time," and to Jilt's surprise he was left alone.

"This man is in the plot, too. He is the same fellow who accosted me the night I went to the rookery to find Billy Bee. Was he keeping an eye on the boy?"

Sol Sphinx was soon in a portion of the city well known to him. He found without difficulty the tall house at whose top he had tried to extract information from Billy Bee, the gamin, and once more he crossed the threshold. But this time he did not climb the stair to the boy's hovel, but turned aside in the hall and knocked at a door there.

He was admitted to a small room, very dirty, and a man who occupied a chair near a stove looked curiously at him.

"Is the boy at home?" asked Sol.

"Billy, ye mean?"

"Yes."

"No, sir, Billy and the man have left us."

"Ho, the man went, too?"

"Yes. He had charge of the boy."

The detective saw a clew, and the following moment he threw a dollar into the lap of the man in the chair.

"I want to know about that man," said he.

"You don't mind telling me, seeing that it will never get you in court."

"I don't. He gave me a cursing before he went off, and said if I'd lived out West, whar he came from, they'd hang me for pastime."

"He said that, did he?"

"Yes, and with an oath, too."

The man then proceeded to narrate all he knew about his late boarder, saying that he seldom let Billy Bee out of his sight.

"When did he come here?" asked Sol.

The man named the day. It was the one following Billy Bee's work for the veiled woman in decoying the Man from San Lopez into the underground trap.

"He watched the boy like a hawk. He went out sometimes, but always when Billy was in the house. I saw him on another street once."

"This same man?"

"The same chap. He was looking out of a window on X—street, just like he lived there."

"That will do," and the man had the satisfaction of clutching another dollar in his scanty lap.

"The man who watched Billy Bee and Brazos Bill are one and the same," said the detective to himself. "I have discovered something that would make Morte listen."

Once more on the street, the ferret had his wits about him.

All at once there came to his ears the sound of carriage-wheels.

The vehicle was behind him, and it was a

strange hour for a carriage to be on that particular thoroughfare. Nearer and nearer it came. In the next street, and not far from the corner stood the tenement in which he had found the dead body of Quicksilver Dan, the husband of Medea of the Mines.

In an instant he fell back among the shadows of the houses and watched the vehicle pass. It rattled along and at the corner stopped. There was no lamp where the stop was made for it was little better than the mouth of an alley and Sol Sphinx did not lose sight of the carriage for a moment.

The wheels had scarcely ceased to revolve ere the door opened and a closely habited figure stepped out. It glided toward the tall house, followed by the shadow and he saw it enter the open hallway and vanish.

To wait until that figure should emerge from the tenement was not his intention. He shot toward the house and sprung into the forbidding doorway.

The same stairs he had ascended rose in the dim light that prevailed, but the woman had disappeared.

Sol Sphinx remembered that Mrs. Harlow had said that whenever she came to the house her feet made no noise on the steps—so soft her tread was—and now he knew it.

The woman had gone up-stairs. To Brazos Bill's room?

The ferret of the city went up, too. He walked as easily as possible and confident that he was making no noise. As he proceeded the scene which Morte of Arizona had word-painted for him—of two men in a small room and one with a six-shooter in his hand demanding of the other a document which he had found in a secret recess in a dirty wall—rose before him.

He reached the head of the first flight, but there a sudden noise stopped him. He was near the door of Quicksilver Dan's fatal abode, and with upturned face was listening with all ears.

A door overhead was opening and a ray of light was falling into the narrow hall and might find its way to him. He fell back to the door of the dead man's room. It yielded and he went in. It was silent and apparently without a tenant.

In a moment there came steps on the stairs and Sol Sphinx grasped the latch. He heard the steps pass him and go down. As they did so he opened his door and looked out. There were two persons on the steps, a man and a woman.

The house was a human bee-hive and what happened just then proved it. All at once a door nearly opposite the persons on the stair opened and the woman drew back with a cry of alarm. At the same time a stream of light fell upon her face and figure, and the gaze of the detective became riveted upon both.

At that instant a veil, until then lifted, dropped, but he had seen enough.

The woman was Estelle Newport—Queen Medea he called her now—and the man was Brazos Bill, her watch-dog and paid spy.

"I don't need another link; the chain is complete," muttered the detective. "I don't wonder that a face like hers captured Quicksilver Dan and ensnared Parke Newport the millionaire."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ARMED TRUCE.

THE detective watched the pair on the steps until the woman crept away and vanished.

"Gone home," muttered Sol Sphinx, and the man who had talked with her drew back into his own den with a grin on his dark face.

Sol followed Mrs. Newport and saw a figure spring into the carriage which was driven rapidly away.

"Does she hold the document the Man from San Lopez found in the recess in the wall?" the ferret asked himself. "Did she come for it? What would Morte have said if he could have seen this meeting? There would have been a tigerish spring and somebody might have got hurt. I don't want that man to hunt me. He grows desperate as the hours wane. If he discovers that Mrs. Newport has the paper she will have the most desperate visitor she has ever received."

On his way back Sol called at Morte's lodgings, but found that the Arizonian was not in. He had not been there for some time and the woman who kept the house knew nothing about him.

Where was the Man from San Lopez?

While the ferret was asking after him at the door of his lodgings a man like him in shape was climbing the stair to Brazos Bill's room.

When he reached the door he did not knock but opened it and suddenly confronted the man, who sprung up at the sound of the latch, and glared at him with a look midway between a grin and a flash.

A quick bound on Morte's part carried him across the space that separated them, and before Bill could draw any weapon he was pinned against the dingy wall and the hands of the Man from San Lopez were at his throat.

"I want it!" hissed Morte. "You have robbed me. You took the paper from beneath Jilt's bed and I have come for it or your life. What is it?"

The only answer he received was a stare, for the mad fingers prevented speech, and Bill could do nothing but look into the blazing eyes of the man who had crossed a continent to unmask an adventuress whose beauty had wrecked more than one life.

"Can't you talk with my claws in yer throat?" continued Morte. "I'll let up a little. Now, what are the papers?"

"You come too late," smiled Bill.

"What, did you surrender the document to her? Did you hand it over to Medea?"

"What's Medea?"

"Up on the avenue, rolling in the wealth she's stolen by false oaths from Parke Newport."

"You don't know anything. When you say that Medea is rich you must be mad."

There was an earnestness in the man's tones that startled the Arizonian. What if he was mistaken? What if, after all, Mrs. Newport was not the lost Queen of the mines?

"But you took the document?" he persisted.

"Did you see me?"

"No, but who else wanted it? You failed to shoot it out of my hands, an' you follered me to Sol Sphinx's office, an' findin' me out, searched the room till you found it under the mattress. What did you say I had come too late for if you didn't steal it back?"

"Well, you can't get it by holding me ag'in' this wall with yer hands under my chin," grinned Bill. "I say you have come too late. The document is ashes now."

"Did you burn it?"

"It's ashes, I say. It's dangerous to have such things laying around. They may throw a cloud over somebody's life one of these days, and especially over a lady's."

"A lady like Medea of San Lopez?" cried Morte.

"Why, yes. What's to hinder her from becoming a real lady some time if let alone?"

"And why should I let her alone? She killed Quicksilver Dan and you know what he was."

No answer.

"They were husband and wife. Did she know when he came to New York, and did she set you on the watch here in this old shanty—telling you to keep an eye on her husband while she ensnared the nabob on the avenue? What does she pay you, Bill?"

The men had fallen apart, but were watching each other like two rival tigers.

"What's the use of all this?" said Bill. "We didn't use ter be enemies, and now we let a woman come between us and make us foes. Why don't you make a trade?"

"A trade with whom?"

"With her."

"With the serpent who wrecked the big bonanza and then ran off? With Queen Medea, who killed Quicksilver Dan and then tried to bury me in an underground flood?"

"There may be millions in this game—millions for both of us," said Bill. "We don't know how much there is in it. Why, it's a bigger thing than the bonanza was in its palmiest days. She's a gold mine within herself."

"What would it be worth?" queried the Man from San Lopez, like a person coming to terms.

"We don't know till we've played the hand."

He could not help looking into the eyes by which he was faced. Was Brazos Bill in earnest? Was he willing to play a hand against the woman he was serving even then?

"But the document? I would like ter have that to build on," said Morte.

"It may not be lost beyond recovery. We might find it if we looked in the right place. I say: what's the use of fighting each other like cats? It recalls old times to see you here, and I'd rather play a hand with you than against you. That's natural."

It was natural, but was it truth?

"What has the detective discovered?" asked Bill.

"About what?"

"In the first place, about Dan's death."

"Sol Sphinx keeps his own secrets."

"But you have been here with him."

"Still he tells me nothing."

"He visits the folks down-stairs—the feather-painter and her little girl. Those people know too much. The child is on the watch all the time, an' mighty few people enter this trap without her knowing it."

"I don't know them," replied Morte. "I saw the girl once, but didn't notice anything more than her pretty eyes. She don't watch you, does she?"

"She watches everybody, egged on by that mother of hers. But let the pair go. I kin take care o' myself ag'in' a girl an' her mother, I reckon. About the play. There's lots in it, Morte. What do you say? It will give you just as much satisfaction in the end as though you avenged the wrecking of the bonanza and the death of Dan, allowing, of course, that that wasn't exactly square."

"But you'll have to go back on your bargain with her."

Brazos Bill laughed.

"That's nothing nowadays. You know what she did in San Lopez? Didn't she swear never to forsake Dan, an' didn't she ride off on the

stage one day an' leave 'im to follow her here?"

The speaker rose and crossed the room to a shelf which was burdened with a lot of traps of all kinds, and taking down something small, he came back to watchful Morte.

"Thar!" the man cried, "they have lots of these in the shop winders o' Broadway. Her beauty took the town before she was here six months. It don't look like her when she was shooting at a mark with us on the plaza, eh, Morte?"

The Man from San Lopez had taken up the picture of the beautiful creature which had been thrown upon the table, and was looking at it closely. The face was that of a woman in the heyday of lovely life, a bewitching face with the darkest of eyes and features rounded and perfect.

"So this is Queen Medea?" said Morte, while he gazed.

"That's the woman who set San Lopez crazy," smiled Bill.

The Arizonian held the photograph at arm's length, and looked at it long and steadily; then he drew it close and studied it as before. Now and then his eyes got a quick gleam of rage, but the superior beauty of the face would soften them, and at last he threw it down.

"I don't wonder that she snared Dan," said he. "She has the face of an angel, but the heart of a fiend."

"I'll admit that."

"She's as destructive as the doctor with whom she is in league."

There was a sudden start on Brazos Bill's part.

"With what doctor?" he exclaimed.

"You know him; you must not tell me that you have been her spy for I don't know how long without discovering that she was playing her game with the help of the Demon Doctor of New York."

"Before Heaven—"

"I wouldn't believe that if you were to swear it on all the Bibles in this city!" broke in the Man from San Lopez. "Anything but that, Bill. You know the doctor and I know you do. But let him go. This picture is beautiful. This is the Queen of the Mines."

"That is Medea, but not as she appeared years ago when she dropped into San Lopez as if thrown from a passing cloud."

"She's struck it rich since. When she ensnared the nabob with the one child—the girl who stands between her and her husband's million—she feathered her nest. But what's the play to be, Brazos?"

"We will have to have another consultation to determine that. Mind you, this detective isn't to be drawn into this game. In fact, he is to step down and out altogether."

"But he will continue to look for the hand that killed Quicksilver Dan."

"A hand which he will never find," was the instant response. "I tell you, Morte, if you want that ferret to do the State continued service you want to throw him off the trail he is on just now."

There was a dark threat in the eyes of the speaker.

"You mean by that that he will have the Demon Doctor to fight?"

"I have not said so," was the answer. "I repeat that if you want Sol Sphinx, as you call him, to live long, you want to throw him off the trail. What is Dan to us, anyhow? He robbed you."

"But the woman made him do it. Dan was honest till she came."

The other laughed again.

The Man from San Lopez pushed back his chair and got up. Standing there he looked down into the eyes of the man at the table and saw a singular light in them.

"Is it friendship or war?" asked Brazos Bill.

"It is just what you are willing to make it."

"Well, I don't want it war," was the sudden retort. "There's too much in this game for both of us, Morte. Here's the hand you first took in San Lopez," and Bill held out his big hand which the other took, and the cat, Black Cactus, witnessed the treaty.

The hands clasped for a moment, fell apart, and in another minute Morte stood once more outside the little room with strange thoughts flitting through his brain. For all he was still suspicious. He had never seen Brazos Bill so willing to compromise a case; he could not believe that the man had turned against the woman he had served so well. It was not his nature to share a spoil with any one; he had never done so in San Lopez, and once or twice he came near being driven from camp by his greediness.

Morte went down to the street. He found the lamps there throwing their light over the stones and far toward the opposite side of the narrow way.

A few steps from the house he glanced back and saw a figure emerge from the front door.

"That's Brazos," thought he. "He is slipping out on my very heels. The man has played a game of his own. He don't intend to share a dollar of what he gets from Queen Medea with any one. It's not his nature."

The Arizonian watched the figure until it had turned the nearest corner, when he turned and

took after it; but Bill was too keen for a man like Morte, and he lost himself in a short time while the Arizonian had to curse his failure to keep him in sight, and admit that he would never make a tracker among the crooks and turnings of Gotham.

"If he had followed Bill—if he had been Sol Sphinx, the ferret—he might have seen him keep on until he reached a large house on one of the well known avenues of Gotham and there viciously jerk a bell.

The door opened in response to Bill's ring, and he was at once admitted.

"I have just seen him," said the man appearing to a handsome woman in the parlor. "He is more determined than ever. Now what would you give for the document?"

The woman started toward Brazos Bill with a sharp cry.

"What, do you know where it is?" she cried.

"What will you give, I said."

"Five thousand dollars."

"No more? I kin get twice that much from him."

CHAPTER XIX.

BRAZOS BILL'S "HAND."

MRS. ESTELLE NEWPORT—she was the woman who confronted Brazos Bill—lost a little color and looked into the face before her.

"He'll give me twice that much," repeated Bill, with the coolness of a practiced villain.

Without more ado, the woman wheeled her rich chair to a small but elegant secretary that stood in the room and opened it. The eyes of the man followed her.

"When did you see him?" she asked over her shoulder.

"Within the past hour."

In another instant the woman had turned toward him again.

"You saw him, and yet you come to me and say that he is still in my way?" she said. "I thought you were in my employ."

Brazos Bill winced under her tones.

"I have been doing service for you, but you must remember that there are laws in this part of the country, that this city is swarming with detectives who are sharper than foxes."

"And what are you? When did you become afraid of them?"

"But I had no chance," said Bill. "I had no chance, I say, to see what could be done."

Estelle made no answer but turned to the secretary again.

"I don't want a check," said Bill, who was eying her.

"You don't, eh?"

"I'm not known at any of the banks."

A smile wreathed for a second the mouth of the millionaire's wife.

"But I haven't the money with me," she said.

"You will have to wait till to-morrow, but I will take the document now."

There was intense eagerness in the voice that spoke, and Bill could see a tremor of excitement sweep over the woman's form.

"How do you know I have it with me?" grinned Bill.

"I know some things without asking questions about them. You have it on your person. Let me have it."

But Brazos Bill seemed to draw back.

Mrs. Newport watched him like a hawk and saw his hand move toward his bosom. The lost document was there—the last trump Morte was looking for—the marriage-certificate written in a far-away camp among the mountains was under her roof, and with it in her possession she could defy the man who had hunted her down with the persistency of a hound.

It would not do to let it escape now. It should not get away. The holder of it should surrender his prize or never leave her house alive.

Such were the thoughts that surged through her brain as she watched the man in the chair near her. He was large and strong with the eye and strength of a tiger, but this should not baffle her. And he wanted to sell it, he the man who had been in her employ ever since one day when he recognized her on the street telling her that her secret was shared by one of the denizens of San Lopez—that Brazos Bill knew that she—Estelle Newport—was, in reality, the Queen of the Mines, and that the man living like a hermit in the tall tenement, Quicksilver Dan and not Parke Newport, was her lawful lord.

From that day she had been in alliance with Brazos Bill; from the date of their sudden encounter they had had an understanding and he had taken a room in the house occupied by Quicksilver Dan where he had watched him and where she had visited her husband, supplying his wants until the arrival of Morte upon the scene, when death came to the tenement and Sol Sphinx found the tenant of the hovel dead on the floor of the den with a bit of paper sewed into the lapel of his coat.

No, it would not do to let the document escape now. It must pass into her hands before Brazos Bill quitted the house.

The movement of his hand toward his bosom told her that he had it with him. He had found it somewhere or had taken it from Morte, but she inclined to the former belief from what he

had said about the Arizonian standing ready to buy it.

"Let me see it," said Estelle. "How do I know what you have to sell if I don't get a look at it?"

Brazos Bill drew forth a crumpled piece of paper which her eyes watched him unfold.

"What is this?" asked the man. "Do you think I would bring a bogus document to you? Here it is, here, in the heavy hand of the man who made you Quicksilver Dan's bride. Look at the names signed here as witnesses."

Estelle leaned toward the paper, but the holder of it fell back, taking it out of reach of the hand itching to throw it into the flames of the grate.

"No, madam," said his sparkling eyes. "I know what I am about. You don't get to clutch this paper without paying for the privilege."

The face of the millionaire's wife was white and twitching now, but she maintained her composure. That it was the genuine document her look showed and Brazos Bill holding it just out of reach was secretly enjoying her baffled triumph.

"I'll sell it which I have a right to do for it cost me something to get it," he went on. "I ran a risk and I ought to be paid for that. Don't you think so? This wasn't in the original bargain."

"I admit that, but—"

"I was to watch him and the boy and I did both. I remained by him till he was out of the way and the boy who was pumped by the detective, won't trouble you again unless he comes back which isn't likely."

"But what do you want for the paper?"

"Ten thousand."

"Which I haven't got by me and you say you don't want a check."

"But you've got jewels."

Estelle started. She had jewels—many of them, but to give them to this man who might sell them in the city and thus bring her name into unpleasant notice?

"Oh," suddenly said Bill, thrusting the paper back into its nest. "If we can't trade I can give him a chance."

A cry broke over the woman's lips.

"You don't mean that," she exclaimed.

"Why not, Medea?"

"Hush!" said Estelle, throwing up her hand.

"Not that name in this house. I left that title you know where."

"It was a pretty name though and I always thought it fitted you to a T."

The only answer to this bit of sport was a dark frown from the nabob's wife.

"You are high in your demands—it is little better than downright robbery, but you know how I am situated," said Estelle rising and crossing the room.

Brazos Bill got up and followed her, his boots making the only sound heard, and when she saw him at her heels she turned upon him with a look he was never to forget.

"I know you of old, Medea," said Bill with a grin, dropping the last word in a whisper. "I don't forget some things with the ease you would expect of me. What are you going to get—the jewels?"

She had reached the stand on one side of the apartment and was about to lift the lid; but his movement had frustrated a deep design betrayed by her eyes.

There was not a jewel in the case but there was something else there, and if the lid had been lifted the eager eyes of the spy would have seen a silver-mounted six-shooter into which he might have had the sudden pleasure of looking at a distance of five feet.

Beaten by the man, Estelle turned back and went to the desk.

"I wasn't too quick that time," muttered Brazos Bill. "She's carried her old spirit to the city, and if I hadn't followed her I'd be handing over the paper with nothing to show for the delivery. I know this woman. She's Medea, as of old, and I wouldn't be in her grip for the world."

Cool, to all outward appearances, the woman was seated at the little desk, and her hands were running hither and thither among the contents before her.

"What is she after now?" thought the man, a few feet away.

All at once Estelle turned and looked into his face.

"You must come again when I am richer," she said.

"What, don't you want what I've got?"

"I don't deny that I would like to have it, but really the position I hold would defend me against it or any other record of the past. What if I should deny that I ever saw or heard of San Lopez? What if I should declare that I never saw the man called Quicksilver Dan, that I never heard of Morte, nor, for that matter, of you? Do you think they would take your testimony against mine? Do you believe for a moment that the word of the wife of Parke Newport would go down before that of a lot of camp roughts?"

She was talking coolly now, and while he listened there came a smile to her face.

"Look at this thing calmly," continued Estelle.

"Think of the poor ground you hold. In the first place, my husband adores me. He would

not believe any one of the statements you or Morte might make. The city would laugh at them. I repeat that I would like to have the document you hold, but I can't afford to be robbed when, by playing the hand I have indicated, I can prevent it."

"Then, you don't intend to pay me what I ask for the document?" asked Bill, when he partially recovered his composure, which had been knocked completely out by Estelle's words.

"I don't intend to be robbed," was the answer.

"Then this settles the matter. Madam, I can go to another market with what I have, and if you court the fight you have hinted at—if you want to meet the charges that can be made—I am willing. How would this paper look staring your husband in the face, with Morte telling the story as he could tell it? How would you look facing the detective who is in Morte's employ—this cool head called Sol Sphinx? And how would you look hearing the boy, Billy Bee, telling what he knows about tolling a man to an underground trap?"

During all this not a muscle of the woman's face was seen to move.

She sat bolt upright in her chair, looking steadily at Brazos Bill, who, at the end of the last sentence settled back in his chair, twirling the ends of his mustache.

"But that's not quite all, madam," said Bill. "What if Quicksilver Dan himself should come forward and tell his little story?"

This time there was a movement. The wife of Parke Newport started violently.

"That man is dead!" she cried.

"Then, I was supposing an impossible case," smiled Bill, not the least bit frustrated.

"I'm not afraid of hearing from that direction."

The man from the old mine crossed his legs and grinned.

"Impossible in your eyes, perhaps," said he. "What if Dan should come forward and say: 'I want my wife, Medea of the Mines? Dead, is he? If dead, who killed him?'"

There was no answer.

"Who came to him the night he was found on the floor by the detective? Who visited him under a veil, to be seen twice by the little feather-painter and her mother in the room below? Who did all this, I say? Madame, don't you think you had best bargain with Brazos Bill?"

Mrs. Newport, with welded lips, left her chair. She stood before the man with her elegant figure drawn up and her eyes riveted upon him.

"What's comin' next, I wonder?" thought Bill, while he watched her.

"You can do one of two things," said she, slowly. "You can take my terms for the document you have to sell, or you can have your demand refused when you come again. I can fight here as well as elsewhere. I am not powerless."

"No, there's the Demon Doctor," said Bill.

"There is more than he on my side. I can summon death in a dozen ways. I can call the dread monster to my aid at all times. You are liable to die before you quit this house, or, if you escape from here, you are apt to drop on the street. I am more than simple Medea of the Mines. I am all-powerful here—more than a match for such men as you. I have not been idle since quitting San Lopez. I have worked for the position I have reached, and I don't intend to be dethroned by a man who carries a bit of paper which may prove a false trump. Take my offer, or do your worst."

"And your offer is—"

"Lay the document on the table, and come to-morrow for your money."

With a laugh Brazos Bill drew back.

"You won't, eh?" said Estelle, as coolly as before. "Very well. I offer nothing more. I am done. Now, attempt to play the card you hold, and the death that will touch you when you don't look for it, will be one of untold horror."

The voice ceased, the finger of Estelle pointed toward the door, and the next minute Brazos Bill found himself on the step of the mansion.

"By Jupiter, she meant what she said. I half wish I had taken her offer," he mused. "She's the same beautiful tigress she used to be. I'll look out for her claws," and he went down the step watched by a pair of eyes at the window.

CHAPTER XX.

TRACKED IN A TRANCE.

THERE was one scene Sol Sphinx, the detective of Gotham, could not for get and that was the last one by which he had been confronted in the house of the Demon Doctor.

Wherever he went he could see Dr. Jallien lying at the foot of his work-bench in the laboratory with his stareful eyes turned to the ceiling.

What had happened after his departure? Who had discovered the man of secret crimes, the man of mystery, dead under his own roof, and what would Estelle Newport do when she should learn that death had overtaken her fellow plotter?

When he quitted the tall tenement where as

we have seen, he witnessed the parting of the millionaire's wife and. Brazos Bill on the stair, he went into that quarter of the city where stood the house of the doctor.

Nothing indicated that the tragedy had been discovered. The house looked as it did when he stole from it with the three vials under his coat. A light burned in the laboratory as he could see from the street and he was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to re-enter the building and see what was there. But he shook off this desire only with hard work, and fell back among the shadows and watched the house.

He did not have to watch very long when the door opened and a muffled figure stole out.

"That is Danton," thought Sol, "Danton, the doctor's spy, and the fellow who tracked me one night. Has he discovered the tragedy? If he has, whither is he going now? To Medea?"

In a moment the man who had emerged from Dr. Jallien's house had a tracker at his heels, and the detective kept close to him like a true hunter.

The hour now was reaching out toward midnight and the clocks would soon proclaim that solemn hour. In some places the streets were almost deserted, and on Broadway, so lively a few hours before, the footsteps of the man followed by Sol Sphinx gave out a ghostly sound. He kept in the shadow of the buildings like a person on a secret mission, and at times Sol almost lost him altogether.

"Heavens, he is going toward Doctor Spray's office," suddenly exclaimed the ferret. "What does he know about the three bottles if his master is dead? Does Danton possess the same subtle powers that Doctor Jallien had when living? Did the Demon Doctor rob Kate Ravelin and give to the young spy that which he took from her?"

The pursued figure kept on and Sol saw it mount the steps of Dr. Spray's office, but did not see it ring the night-bell. Instead of doing this the man leaned toward one of the little windows near the door and the next moment the face was glued to the glass.

Sol Sphinx approached on tip-toe. He could see that the person he had tracked was attracted by something inside, but could not see just what it was.

By and by the figure at the doctor's window fell back and started off again. Sol the ferret followed as before.

It led him back from Broadway now; it kept aloof from that street and at length entered the quiet one inhabited by Pearl Newport, the fair victim of the plot.

"There is some new villainy afoot," said Sol to himself. "The life of the girl is in danger to-night and the destroyer is abroad."

He kept after his quarry until he saw it sneaking toward the house which he had never visited, but the situation of which he knew in spite of this fact, and he now watched the flitting figure with more care than ever before.

He saw it pass the house leaning toward it, as if to see the number over the door, but in a moment it came back, performing the same pantomime. The house stood apart from its nearest neighbor, but a narrow way ran between them, and into this slipped the man almost before the detective could divine his intention.

The house was dark, showing that its young occupant was asleep and dreamless of the fate which he had tracked from street to street. It was a two-story frame, not unlike its neighbors, and easy to break into by any one used to such acts.

Sol Sphinx, thinking of nothing now but the saving of Pearl from a doom which he felt was hovering over her devoted head, sprung to the dark passageway between the two houses, but could see nothing of the man.

He had vanished as if the darkness had not been pierced.

Presently there came down the flags of the little passage a footstep, the sound of which threw Sol against the opposite wall, which he hugged as he had never hugged a dark wall before.

On, on it came, until he heard the man stop near him, so near that he could have put out his hand and touched him.

Not a sound broke the silence now. Strain his eyes as he might, the detective could not see the man though he knew he was there, and he with an effort kept his hand from darting forward and seizing him in the gloom.

For some minutes the unseen man stood within reach of the ferret's eager fingers, when he started off down the passage once more, not this time followed by Sol, who feared that a knife might lurk in the dark, and if Danton was moving off—going back to the Demon Doctor's house—why not let him go in peace?

"Did Danton find the paper I may have lost when under the doctor's spell?" the detective asked himself. "I feel that I was robbed of something in the laboratory. Was it the address of the lost girl? If not, how came Danton to know that she is in that house?"

Until past midnight Sol Sphinx occupied a certain spot in the alley, waiting for the return of the Demon Doctor's spy, and keeping guard over the millionaire's menaced child.

When a single note was struck by the nearest

clock, he stole forth and went back. There was a light in Dr. Spray's little office, and Sol rung and was admitted.

He was warmly greeted by the doctor and Marcil's friend.

"Your 'find' has bothered me a great deal," said the doctor. "I have subjected the strange contents of the vials to a strict analysis, but they puzzle me yet. There is something antidotative here," and he laid his hand on one of the three bottles which stood before him. "I believe that this one contains life for Pearl Newport, but if I were sure of it!"

"If you could have dragged into your office the man who was at the window some hours ago you might have solved the secret," said the detective.

"Who was there?"

"Danton, the Demon Doctor's spy."

"Did you see him?"

"I followed him from the house."

"Ah, if I had but known this," cried Dr. Spray. "What a chance it was to have entered the mysterious house and searched for the elixir of life. Where did the spy go from here?"

Sol Sphinx proceeded and narrated his adventures, listened attentively to by the doctor.

"Is your friend up yet?" he suddenly asked laying his hand on Sol's arm.

"Kate?"

"Kate, the mind-reader—the wonderful girl who can track people in a trance."

"She sleeps like a cat, for the superstitious come to her at all hours, but you forget that her singular talent has nearly left her—stolen by this very Demon Doctor of New York."

"It would be worth trying, anyhow."

"What would?"

"Why, the tracking of the man you have seen to-night. It is a fresh trail. Let us try it."

Five minutes later the detective and the doctor were moving toward the ramshackle building which stood behind Kate Ravelin's house, and the summons which Sol delivered at the fortune-teller's door was answered after a brief delay.

Kate stood before them with a white face and looking like one suddenly frightened out of a dream.

She had seen Dr. Spray once or twice before and greeted him with a smile, but to Sol she was as kind as usual. But when the detective explained the nature of their call she started quickly and shook her head.

"I fear you have come too late," said she.

"But the trail is very fresh," broke in the eager doctor. "In fact, it is not an hour old."

"And that man cannot find it?" smiled Kate pointing at the detective.

"The best of hounds lose the trail sometimes. The life of a beautiful young girl is the stake in this game and we thought you would try—"

"I will!" cried Kate Ravelin. "I will bend all my energies to this, perhaps my last, trance. Show me the starting stake, Sol."

The fair fortune-teller had assumed her usual position and her hand rested lightly in the detective's palm.

He gave her the cue; he started the figure from the door of Dr. Jallien's house and then looked into the face before them.

For a long minute Kate was silent and statue-like, and the two men were about to believe that her lips were not to part at all when she spoke.

"I have tracked him to a house, and now he looks into one of its windows; but there are shadows before me and I nearly lose him as he moves off."

"Don't lose him, for heaven's sake!" cried Dr. Spray.

"I see him now," said the girl, with more decision than before. "He has plunged into a passage between two houses. He goes down it a little distance, but he comes back and stops. He is looking at the house before him and now he starts off once more."

Sol Sphinx could see that the girl was working with the greatest effort. She was virtually fighting for the retention of a talent which was on the wane; she was putting all her strength into her trial.

"He is out of the alley now and on the street once more," said Kate. "I can see him now. No, I won't lose him. He is walking fast, and, since quitting the passage, has pulled his hat over his eyes. Now he is in a better quarter of the city where the streets are wider and the lamps brighter. He has mounted the steps of a house which I have seen before."

A perceptible shudder passed over the mind-reader's frame.

"I am inside with him now. He enters a doctor's office."

Sol Sphinx and the doctor exchanged rapid glances.

"Now he has thrown aside his hat and cloak. He stands in the firelight and rubs his hands. Ah, that is the man I have followed on the streets. What a handsome man he is. Doctor Jallien is at home!"

A loud cry fell from Sol's tongue and he almost dropped the hand he had held.

"Not Doctor Jallien, Kate!" he cried, at which the girl started from her trance.

"What did you say, sir?" asked the fair fortune-teller.

"Come, go back and take another look at this man in his office," said the detective.

"I will try, Sol."

Kate fell once more into the mysterious state and the ferret and doctor watched her with renewed interest. The cue which set her back on the old trail was clearly given.

"I see him now. He is not in the office, but in a room which looks like a chemist's workshop," said the girl. "He is bending over a bench watching the contents of a bluish vial drop into a little retort. It is Doctor Jallien—the tiger with velvet-covered claws."

"Don't mistake him," said Sol Sphinx. "I saw that man fall dead at the foot of the very bench at which you see a man now."

"I know only what I see," was the answer.

Once more the strange girl came out of the trance and looked at her companions.

"Did I find the trail?" she asked, with a smile.

"You did. The talent is coming back to you. You are not going to lose it, Kate; but you will hold it to help me on many a trail besides the one I am on now."

"I—don't—know. I feel that something is near me—something which I can't fight off. You know the Demon Doctor of New York—the man who has robbed me with his mysterious force? I felt him near me all day, though, of course, I could not see him. While that man lives I am in danger."

"But he is dead!"

The girl sprung and clutched the detective's arm.

"Dead—the Demon Doctor dead?" she cried.

"Yes."

The next moment Kate fell back with a cry of joy and sunk into a chair.

"Kate, I saw him fall dead," continued Sol Sphinx. "I was in his net when the end came."

But the girl did not seem to hear. Sol, the ferret, bent over her, but in a moment drew back and looked at the doctor.

"My God, she is dead, too!" he exclaimed; but Dr. Spray, after a hasty glance, said:

"You have thrown her into one of her strange states. She—"

He was suddenly checked by the girl's voice.

"I see a serpent crawling upon a bird. The skin of the snake is beautiful, and the bird is charmed by it. Nearer and nearer comes the serpent and the bird moves not. It will fall into the mouth of the beautiful snake! Why don't it see its danger? Now—now, the snake is a snake no longer. It has the head of a man, and the face of Doctor Jallien!"

The voice had barely ceased when the hand of Dr. Spray fastened on the detective's arm.

"Come!" he cried. "I know what this means. The Demon Doctor has come out of the death trance. He came back from exile in India with the dread secrets of the Mystics. The bird in the power of the serpent is Pearl Newport, the child of the plot."

Sol Sphinx looked at Kate Ravelin and hesitated.

"The girl will take care of herself. She has a gift which is very rare; but, unless checked, it will kill her in time. Let her come back to life at her leisure. You have work elsewhere. You must save Marcil's love from the Demon Doctor. It may be too late now."

That was enough. Sol Sphinx needed no other incentive. He rushed from the house with Dr. Spray, and in a minute was in the open air.

"Go and watch the treasures in your office," he said, pushing the doctor from him. "Let me meet this tiger in plush."

He was far away before Dr. Spray could recover, and as he turned a corner he was seized by a hand, and a man whom he recognized in the lamplight, cried:

"I've been looking for you. Come with me. I've found Quicksilver Dan!"

It was the Man from San Lopez.

CHAPTER XXI.

NETTED ONCE MORE.

"You find Quicksilver Dan? Man, you must be mad."

"Not quite so bad as that, I hope," grinned the Man from San Lopez. "But come with me and let me show you what I have discovered."

Sol Sphinx did not relish the thought of being led from the errand just then before him, but he told Morte to go ahead and they were soon on another street.

The detective was anxious to know what the Arizonian had discovered, and when he found himself being guided toward the tall old house on X—street, he looked at his friend with a smile.

"You are going back to the old nest," said he.

"I know it. Dan is there."

"Alive?"

The only answer he received was a grin as Morte looked up into his face, and when they reached the house itself the Man from San Lopez seemed to lose some of his eagerness and drew back.

"The old room is occupied," said he. "The room in which you found Dan dead is tenanted again, but by the ghost of my old pard."

"Nonsense!" cried the detective. "Did you throw me from my trail to tell me this?"

"It is true," cried Morte. "By Jove, I swear to you, Sol Sphinx, that the new renter is the ghost of the dead. Go up and see."

"Come along, then."

Sol Sphinx plunged into the old trap and was soon on the stair.

The face of the Arizonian was nearly white.

"I never took any stock in spooks," he said in trembling voice. "They used to say that the big bonanza was haunted, but I never believed it. Now I've changed my mind. The man in room 28 isn't flesh and blood."

He was saying this at the ferret's heels as they went up the steps, the detective in advance, but at the top of the flight Morte stopped and stood stock-still.

The door of the room once inhabited by Quicksilver Dan was right before them, and the gaze of the Man from San Lopez was fixed upon it.

Sol Sphinx moved forward and knocked.

In an instant the portal was opened by a man whose face did bear a striking resemblance to that of the dead miner's, and at sight of it the man behind the detective drew back still further and uttered a little cry.

"That is the man!" Sol heard him say, and the ferret broke into a laugh.

"Come, then, and look at your ghost."

The Man from San Lopez moved forward, stared at by the man who had opened the door for the detective.

"Is this Quicksilver Dan?" asked Sol.

"No but that is not the man I saw awhile ago."

"I have been here since I took the room a few hours since," answered the stranger. "Do I look like some friend of yours?"

"I beg your pardon," said Morte. "Come, let us be going," and he took hold of Sol and pulled him away.

As they went down the stair the detective glanced toward Brazos Bill's apartment, and the sharp eyes of Morte noticed the look.

"Do you think your old pard is at home?" queried Sol.

In an instant an eager desire seemed to light up the Arizonian's eyes.

"If he isn't, Black Cactus is, an' nobody's afraid of a cat," he smiled. "He may have left the document on the premises. Why not look? It wouldn't be robbery to despoil him."

The Man from San Lopez moved toward the door and found it locked.

"He is out, but that ought to tell us to proceed," he said, looking at Sol. "I can break this door in. I want to grip that paper—my big trump—once more. The next time it won't quit me till I am ready to give it up. He said it was ashes, but he lied—I saw the lie in his eye. I want the document."

With the last word the Arizonian pushed against the door and it fell in to the astonishment of a huge black cat which got out of the way with a bound.

"Use your eyes to advantage now and do it well," said the detective. "I'll stand guard out here, for he might come in. Tigers come home whenever they feel like it, and this one is liable to put in an appearance at any time."

Thus admonished, Morte began to search the room, looking wherever he thought a piece of paper might be hidden, but nothing promised to reward him.

Meantime Sol Sphinx grew impatient. He thought of the last effort put forward by Kate Ravelin, and the advice received from Dr. Spray. Morte had turned him from his mission and the life of Pearl might be in danger that very night if the man he had tracked from Dr. Jallien's office was the Demon Doctor and not Danton, the young spy.

"I must leave you," said he, looking in upon Morte who did not want to quit the room without finding the paper of which he had been despoiled.

"I'll stay till I finish the job," was the reply. "It must be here for I don't think he would trust himself on the street with it. I'll keep one eye on the door an' if he drops in he won't catch the Arizonian weasel asleep."

Sol Sphinx went down the stair and at Mrs. Harlow's door stood the widow herself.

"Can you stop a moment?" asked the woman.

The detective replied by dropping into the room and smiled at Tressy at her little table painting feathers. He never found the child idle.

"I have been puzzled much of late," continued Mrs. Harlow. "In the first place, the room of the dead man has received a new tenant."

"I have just seen him."

"He looks like the one who died—the man called Jack Bromley, by some, by others, Quicksilver Dan."

"The resemblance is not very strong."

"Then, I am almost sure you haven't seen the right man. Tressy was coming down from Mrs. Turner's this evening, and she almost fell in a faint on the stair, for before her stood the exact counterpart of the dead lodger. The resemblance is remarkable."

The positiveness of the woman amused the ferret.

"What has become of the man in Room 29?" he asked.

"He went off at the heels of his last visitor—a man as tall and broad as himself. I don't think he has come back. But this is not all. The woman in the vail went up awhile ago."

"The one you met on the steps the night you think Jack Bromley died?"

"The same one."

"Did you see her come down?"

"We have seen nothing of her."

"But you say that she makes no noise when she comes down-stairs."

"That is true; she has the tread of a cat."

"Like the big black one in Room 29," put in Tressy with a smile.

"I have had an introduction to Black Cactus," said Sol, and the next moment he bade the couple good-night and went off.

The Man from San Lopez was still searching Brazos Bill's room. He was eager to grasp the paper of which he had been robbed, and nothing was escaping his eager eye.

The door stood ajar, but he did not notice it. The cat on the table was following him with his eyes, and Morte was gliding hither and thither, running his hands into everything that promised to yield something.

All at once the door opened a little more. The Arizonian's back was to it, and he did not see the figure that came across the threshold.

It was the figure of a woman veiled. It moved forward until it stood near the table from which the cat had jumped with a whine of terror, which caused Morte to break off his search and start up.

"Jehosaphat!" cried the Man from San Lopez. "In the name of the dead, when did you come in?"

The answer he got was the look which became fixed upon him through the vail.

He stared at the intruder, and then looking down, saw what had escaped his eye until then. One of the hands at the woman's side held a revolver, and the gloved fingers were dangerously close to the trigger.

Intuition seemed to tell him that he stood face to face at last with the main object of his vengeance—that he had found the lost Queen of the Mines, Medea of San Lopez. If not, who could she be, and why had she invaded Brazos Bill's room at that hour?

"What are you looking for here?" said the unknown. "This is not your room."

"Right you are; but I have a right to search it. I only want what I have lost—"

"Do you think it is here?" was the interruption.

"It is unless he took it with him."

"Did he rob you?"

"He did."

"Of what?"

Morte leaned toward the speaker before he spoke again. He tried to penetrate the vail and see the face underneath, but its blackness prevented.

"What did he take from you? money?" said the same voice.

"Something of more value than that."

"Are you sure that you have searched this room well?"

"I haven't let an inch of space pass unexamined. I've searched everything but the cat."

It seemed to Morte that the eyes beneath the vail let out a gleam of laughter at this, but he was not sure. Oh, for a glimpse beneath the vail! Was the woman Medea of the Mines? Had he at last found the wife of Quicksilver Dan, and had she come to the room for the purpose of subjecting it to a rigid search for the very thing which had escaped his eye?

"If you have searched the room you will come with me," said she. "I have business of the utmost importance with you."

"With me?" stammered Morte.

"With you."

"Couldn't it be transacted here?"

"With him liable to drop in at any time? No, sir, the business cannot be transacted here. My carriage is near and we will go at once to my house."

A sudden eagerness which he was to regret before he should come to die seized upon the Man from San Lopez. At her house the vail would be lifted and he would see her face to face. Then he would settle the mystery of the hidden features and would know whether she was whom he thought her—Queen Medea of the Mines.

"I'll go," said the Arizonian. "Show me the carriage."

She turned, and he followed her from the room and the cat whined them down the stair.

On the street below, Morte kept close to the woman, who led him to a carriage which stood in the gutter at the nearest corner. Her hand opened the door and he stepped inside.

In another moment the vehicle was rattling over the streets and Morte had settled back into the dark depths of one corner and was catching a glimpse now and then of the form on the other seat. More than once during the ride he thought of Sol Sphinx and wondered what the ferret would think if he could know of this strange adventure. But Sol was far away on another mission.

Suddenly a fear took possession of Morte's soul. What if he was being taken to another

trap as dread as the one underground? What if he was to read his doom again, written on stone, and to see the water seep through rock to his destruction?

"I'll watch like a hawk this time," mused Morte. "I won't be caught napping. I know what this woman wants if she is Medea, and I'll see that she loses her play."

He thought the carriage was taking him to the limits of the city, but it stopped at last and the woman moved. She opened the door, and he looked out. During the last few minutes his hand had rested on the butt of a six-shooter, and now he gripped it with renewed determination.

"Here we are," said the voice from under the vail.

When Morte stepped from the carriage he saw that he had been driven into a sort of court and away from the street. The huge form of a house loomed up before him and he was guided toward it by his conductor.

"I go to the end of this adventure," he said to himself. "To face this woman I would tread the coals of hades!"

The next instant a door was opened and shut. Morte was in the house, but in the dark as well. A hand was still at his wrist.

"This way. We will have light in a moment," was whispered at his elbow.

Presently he was met by a light which flashed up without warning, and he found himself in an elegant parlor, the shutters of which were tightly drawn.

"Here is where I live, Morte of San Lopez," said the woman, and then the vail fell to the floor and revealed a face from which he staggered with a cry.

"By Jove, I thought so all along!" he said. "You are Medea of the Mines."

"Yes, I am the woman you have hounded across the continent."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GRIP OF THE VISE.

"BE cool, Morte," said the Arizonian within himself. "Now, if ever, you want all your wits. You are in the lair of the tigress and you must not lose your head, for if you do you lose the whole game. This is Medea of the Mines—this is the woman who broke you up, first by insinuating your partner and then by making him dishonest."

All this time the eyes of the beautiful woman were riveted upon him and she was looking him through, as it were, for they had not stood face to face so fairly for years.

He looked down at her hand. It was gloved, but looked as small and shapely as the one he had seen write upon the wall of stone the words:

"Die as the fool dieth."

Monte waited for the woman to speak again. "You are in my house," said she. "I have brought you to the home of the woman you have just called Medea of the Mines. You are in my power."

"I've been there before, but I have escaped," replied the Man from San Lopez. "I have seen that hand write my doom upon a stone wall and have heard the water trickle down upon the floor at my feet to rise there until it was up to my waist, as it used to rise in the old mine before you left the diggings."

A smile broke over the white face before him.

"That look would give you away anywhere," cried Morte. "That smile would mark you for Medea of Arizony."

"Do you think so, Morte? Well, let us come to business."

Beautiful Estelle Newport—the true identity of the miner's insnarer need not be kept from the reader longer, for he has doubtless guessed it ere this—waved Morte to a chair while she took another and proceeded.

"You have hunted me high and low. I have not tried to escape you though I knew you would not give up the hunt until we came together; but there is such a thing as self-preservation, and I have looked after it."

She stopped and seemed to take in the elegance of the room as if to be unmasked meant the loss of it all.

"I am now the wife of Parke Newport, one of the prominent men of this city. Behind me lies San Lopez, and there, too, the life I led there as she—"

She stopped again.

"Why don't you go on? As the wife of Quicksilver Dan," said Morte.

A shudder seemed to sweep over the face of the millionaire's wife.

"You have uttered the words I abhor because they bring up a past I have tried to drown. But why hide it from you? Yes, as the wife of Dan Dalton I inhabited San Lopez, but all that is behind me and now I am happy here—no, not happy while I am hunted by you."

Was she trying to enlist his sympathies? Was Medea of the Mines trying to break the force of the oath taken among the lights and shadows of the mountain camp? Morte threw all sympathy from him.

"Then I need not tell you why I have hunted

you down," he said. "I need not tell you of the oath I took far across the continent to follow some day the woman who robbed me of my hard-earned riches and made my partner a thief against his will. Where is he now?"

"He is dead," answered Medea without a tremor of fear.

"But what became of the body?"

"The dead are buried in this city, as elsewhere."

"But who buried Quicksilver Dan, your only lawful husband?"

The lips before him came together and the eyes flashed.

"If you know that he is dead isn't that enough?" she said.

"No. I want to know where he sleeps. Woman, you must tell me this. I am in your house, but what of that? You must tell me how Dan died; you must show me that his death was natural, or—"

She had leaned toward him and he stopped.

"Or what, Morte, tiger?" she asked.

In an instant he was on his feet towering above her like a giant.

"Or I will openly accuse you of his murder!" he cried.

Not a muscle beneath him moved. The face seemed to get a trifle whiter, that was all, and the hands in Medea's lap toyed with her dark gloves.

"You will accuse me of killing him, will you?" she asked.

"By the God above us I will! Why should I spare you? What have you ever done to hold back my avenging hand at this time?"

"I could have married you instead of him," was the reply.

"Instead of Quicksilver Dan?"

"Yes. I had my choice of the camp. You know that."

Morte grinned.

"We are not discussing your courtship of San Lopez," said he. "You took Dan because you wanted to play the hand you afterward played to my sorrow. Where is he, I say?"

Medea did not speak.

"Woman, silence is sometimes a confession of guilt."

"Monster, you can accuse, but when it comes to proof you are powerless."

"Then, let the future show if you have shorn the locks of the Man from San Lopez!"

He fell back and threw a quick glance toward the door. He saw the glance of the woman before him dart in the same direction.

"What is your first move?" she asked.

"Wait and see."

"This is not San Lopez, with its ferreting committee of old days; this is New York, with its traps, strange mysteries and terrible deaths. Morte, even now, you are standing on the edge of a precipice from which you may step at any time."

In an instant the miner recoiled; he thought of the trap which once before in a strange house opened at his feet and precipitated him into a dungeon. Was there another door at his feet now?

A laugh broke over the lips of Medea at this, and her eyes sparkled in the light of the jet overhead.

"There is no trap under you," said she. "The danger is at hand all the same. It is now at your throat, and this is the vengeance of Medea of the Mines."

In another second the room was wrapped in total darkness. The jet went out as if shut off by magic, and the air suddenly became heavy with choking fumes.

Morte of San Lopez, realizing that he was in the power of some destructive agent, tried to fight off the overpowering gases. They filled his lungs; they took possession of his heart, and seemed to stop its beating. A hand seemed to grip his throat, but he knew no hand was there.

It was worse than the dungeon trap with its dripping water; it was a death which could have no parallel.

But what seemed as terrible as the deadly fumes was the laugh that came from the lips of the creature who had netted him. It was the laugh of a fiend, and went to his heart like an arrow.

He staggered across the room with the desperation of despair. It was a stagger through Egyptian darkness, his hands clutching at air, and his head racked by a thousand pains. Wildly did he try to grasp something that would keep him from falling; vainly did he throw out his hand in search of the woman who had lured him to doom; they touched nothing.

The end of all this seemed to come in a fall from a great height.

Morte of San Lopez seemed to drop from a cliff and the following moment was falling, so his confused brain thought, down, down to death.

There came a time when the grip of the demon seemed to slip from his heart-strings. Morte raised his head and put out his hands. As before they could touch nothing.

Thought came back to him and he got upon his feet. He crept forward until he touched a chair, and from it found his way to a smooth

wall. To him it was another dungeon, only this one was furnished where the first had been bare.

At last there shone for him a streak of light which illumined the room, showing him that he was no longer a tenant of Medea's parlor; but where was he? The ceiling was higher and plain; the walls were bare of ornament, and in one corner stood a short bench which had a vise fastened at one edge.

"The rat is in another trap," smiled the miner, when he had surveyed his prison. "If I had not tarried in Brazos's den looking for something which was not there, I would not have fallen into this snare; but Medea knew where to find me and she played her game to a finish. But this is not her house; it cannot be. I am elsewhere. Am I back in the house of the underground room?"

He looked again at the vise, and then at the only door the room contained. It was strong and seemed able to resist the attacks of a Hercules. Morte went to it and seized the knob, but a backward pull and a twist availed nothing.

"I thought so!" he laughed.

To find the door unyielding was to wish for some battering-ram with which to attack it. His gaze fell upon the vise, and in a moment he was at the bench looking at the fastenings of the proposed weapon.

"I can pull it loose," said he. "With it in my hands I can break down the door, and woe to the man or woman who attempts to keep me from the street!"

The next instant he seized the vise, and his hands were about to wrench it from the bench when a shadow of horror crossed his face. In a second his eyes seemed to be starting from his head, and he was tied to the vise by some invisible cords!

The Man from San Lopez fell back and tried to release the implement of steel, but he could not. A strange electric shock had taken possession of him, and he was the prisoner of the vise.

"With what is that woman not armed?" cried Morte, in his agony. "I am caught by an infernal battery concealed somewhere. My intentions have been anticipated, and the current has caught me. I can be held here till I drop dead!"

This new horror was enough to blanch the cheeks of the Arizonian, and he stood erect gritting his teeth and glaring at the thing which held him prisoner.

Suddenly the door sent forth a sound. A key had turned in the lock, and Morte looked over his shoulder.

The door was opening and he saw beyond it the figure of a man.

"Come in," grinned Morte. "I won't run off," and he looked at the vise again.

There now stepped across the threshold a fine looking man, barely forty, with a keen eye and an excellent carriage.

"The Demon Doctor," thought the Man from San Lopez. "I am in his house."

The man came forward smiling at the prisoner and not halting until he was within a few feet of him. Then he looked into Morte's face and with a quick glance inspected the vise.

"Fairly caught, I see," said he.

"Call it what you like, I'm here," was the reply.

The Arizonian's visitor fell back and coolly folded his arms.

"A man of your experience should have known better," he went on. "I would have thought that you would have had your eyes open. What would you do if released?"

"I would make it hot for the witch of camp and city!" was the retort.

"Just what the fool would do. You would play moth till you fell scorched—dead at the foot of the lamp."

"That'd be some satisfaction if I could finish the game before falling thar."

The man smiled.

"Morte of San Lopez, I have come to tell you that you are to die where you are," he said. "The shock which holds you to the vise will never vary. It will hold you until you fall back dead. You have played one hand too many. You should have smothered your desire for vengeance among the mountains of Arizona; you signed your death-warrant when you came to this city."

"You are Doctor Jallien," said Morte. "You are the Demon Doctor of New York. There is upon your white skin the mark of the galleys. You have infused into the veins of Pearl Newport, now beyond your power, a poison which may take her off yet. You dare not throw off the power of your infernal concealed battery—not even for a moment. You know you can stand what you are an' tell me that I am to hang here till dead. But don't think that I shall be long unavenged. There is one who will baffle you—one who is now upon your track and who, in spite of all your sorcery, will eventually drag you into the light and show to this city the sign of the galleys."

Not a muscle of the face near Morte of San Lopez moved during the utterance of these words. The Demon Doctor was a statue where

he had stopped, but in his eye was a gleam of triumph.

"You helped to break Quicksilver Dan's life trail; you may break mine; but look out for your own!" continued Morte.

Then the statue moved. A quick step carried Dr. Jallien to the miner's side and his face, with all the handsome demonism of a fiend's, almost touched the one above the vise.

"You are right," he hissed. "So far as your future is concerned, you are dead now. Good-by, Morte of San Lopez," and the leopard tread of the Demon Doctor moved across the room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TWO EMPTY NESTS.

WHILE the events we have just recorded were following each other in rapid succession other scenes which demand our attention were transpiring in another quarter of the city.

There was moving toward a house which he had seen before the figure of Sol Sphinx, the ferret.

"It is you, is it?" suddenly cried a voice as the arm of the detective was grasped and he looked down into the white face of Marcell Poynter—Pearl Newport's devoted young lover.

"When did you begin to watch?" asked Sol, calling to mind the man he had tracked from Dr. Jallien's office to the house where the girl was concealed.

"I have not been here long; in fact, I have not entered the house, but have watched it from the outside. I did not want to disturb Pearl. Thank heaven, she is safe yet. No one has been here since I came."

"You have a key?"

"I have."

"Then let us go in," said the ferret. "I have just come from a scene which renders me anxious about your friend."

Marcell produced his key and stepped forward.

"We must not disturb Pearl if she is safe," he said in low tones. "We can enter the house without her knowledge and she will be none the wiser of our visit until I choose to tell her."

The next moment the door yielded to the key and the couple stood in a small room where all was still.

Marcell turned on the gas and let it softly flood the place.

"Pearl's bedroom is yonder," said he, pointing toward a door on the further side of the chamber. "She retires early for she needs all the rest she can get to fight the monster she is contending against. But the door is ajar!"

Sol had noticed this. The door leading to the girl's room stood open the width of a finger, and he saw Marcell spring forward and halt at the threshold.

There he listened for the breathing of the woman he worshiped, but his white face told a story which could not escape the detective's glance.

"I hear her not," said he when Sol had moved over to him. "The silence of death dwells in there. What if Pearl—"

He recoiled unable to articulate the rest of the sentence and the ferret laid his own hand on the knob.

"We must know the truth be what it may," he said, opening the door.

Marcell, staring at him, waited for his report.

"Miss Pearl is not in there," spoke the detective, coming out and looking at the youth.

Marcell sprung into the room and looked at the couch which was empty.

"We have come too late! The Demon Doctor has found his patient, but in Heaven's name how did he come to discover her?"

Sol Sphinx stood dumb before this question. He recalled his own adventure in the doctor's laboratory, and realized more than ever now that he had been robbed of something precious by the Demon Doctor.

He had reached the house too late and all because Morte had dragged him momentarily from the trail. Curses upon the head of the Man from San Lopez! He had taken him to the tenement to show him a man who resembled Quicksilver Dan, but who was quite another person, and by the diversion he had arrived too late to protect Pearl from the handsome poisoner of New York.

The agony of Marcell standing in the middle of the room was something terrible.

"All is lost now!" he cried. "We cannot hope to find her outside of her own home again. There she will be under the hand of the Demon Doctor and watched like a tigress by the woman who wants her wealth. If I thought I could tear him in twain I would invade his den tonight and do it."

"All is not lost," answered Sol. "Remember that I have not left the trail and until I do there will remain a chance."

Marcell turned to him a face stamped with pain.

"I must trust you, but some one has betrayed us. I don't accuse Doctor Spray, I don't accuse you, and I know I have not given Pearl back to her enemies. But we have been betrayed, I say."

"Why not say 'watched?'" added Sol.

"I will say that, for I do not want to think that we have been betrayed. Pearl is gone."

Why search the house? The nest is empty; the hawk has plundered it."

Ten minutes later Sol Sphinx and Marcil left the house and might have been seen making their way toward Dr. Spray's little office.

The doctor heard them calmly.

"Kate the Wonderful saw the right man," said he, looking at the detective. "Why not go at once and by her aid trace Pearl. She seems to be recovering her lost powers."

Sol glanced at his watch.

"I will go," he said. "I will visit Kate alone this time."

He lost no time in reaching the house of the fair fortune-teller, and his knuckles were rapping at the dead hour of night at the rear door.

There was no answer, and the detective waited five minutes before he moved.

"We left her in a strange state," thought he. "The reported death of the Demon Doctor seemed to deprive her of certain powers, and she may not have come out of it in good shape."

He left the door for a window alongside. He broke out a pane and raised the lower sash. In another minute he stood in Kate's house with silence all about him. The stair was right ahead and he groped his way to the room above. Everywhere silence as below.

The detective of Gotham arrived at the door of Kate's room before he halted. There he knocked, waited a moment and knocked again. No answer.

"Is this another mystery, or is the dead in there?" said the detective, seizing the latch, and he stood on the threshold of the fortune-teller's chamber.

Until now he had done his hunting in the dark, but a lucifer found the burner and the room suddenly stood revealed to its darkest corner.

It was untenanted.

The bed had been touched, but he recalled his former visit with Dr. Spray. They had roused the girl from a sound sleep, and she had promised to go back to her couch.

"What is this?" cried the detective, noticing that something small and half folded lay on the oval stand near the head of the couch.

It was a bit of paper looking out from under a paper-weight and in an instant his hand had it in its grip.

"This is in Kate's handwriting," he went on, moving toward the light. "She left this for whoever might come. By Jove, she wrote it for me!"

Sol Sphinx stood under the jet reading the note which seemed to still his heart.

"FOR SOL SPHINX, MY BEST FRIEND:—

"I am tired of this battle against the power that is sapping my very life. I have fought against it until surrender must come and it is here. You have been my friend through thick and thin; but forget that I have lived and struggled—that Kate Ravelin, the waif, ever crossed your path. I will be better off among the waves of the river than here fighting the unequal battle with the powers no human heart can conquer. To forget me will be to bring you happiness in the days that are to come. Good-by."

KATE."

Sol Sphinx read this again and again, or until every word was seared on his brain.

In that last letter not a word about the Demon Doctor of New York. Not a line concerning the man who had been her secret foe—nothing beyond a mention of the "power" against which she had struggled, and it could be construed to refer to the man from prison.

The Ferret Detective crumpled the note in his hand and turned from that little room. He looked once at the appliances of magic which the girl had accumulated during her brief career as a seeress, and thought of the little triumphs she had won with them, and how she had laughed when telling him about her dupes.

He could now go back to Dr. Spray and Marcil and tell them of the second mystery of the night. He could show them the note and convince them that the girl had stepped from the game, tired of fighting the infernal magic of the Demon Doctor.

But another idea suggested itself when he emerged from the old house and moved toward the sidewalk.

The girl would be likely to take the most direct course to the river, and he would trace her to death if he could. He moved down the street, turned the right corner, and reached the pier. A cold wind blowing under the stars of early morning, almost swept the blood from his face, and he saw the flicker of the lamps of the wharf. But not a human being could he see.

By and by there came out of the shadow of a post the figure of a man. Sol Sphinx appeared so suddenly to this person that he fell back and stared at him as if he were a ghost.

Policeman Finerty had not been asleep at his post; he had only been sheltering a portly figure from the wind, and when he discovered that the detective did not want to carry off a portion of the pier, he became communicative.

He had seen no one on the pier for hours. Yes, he had several times prevented young women from leaping into the cold flood, and was always on the lookout for them, but none had bothered him that blessed night.

To make sure, he went along the pier a goodly distance with his bull-eye making a mark on the water, and Sol Sphinx was at his heels,

looking down into the flood; but the two saw nothing.

"That girl didn't come this way, that's sur-tin'," said the policeman. "Mebbe she changed her notion and went back. 'I've known 'em to do this, especially when the tide's cold and rough lookin' like it is this blessed noight. No trouble, sir. I'm always willing," and Finerty touched his cap to Sol and went back to the lee-side of his post.

Agreeably disappointed, the detective turned from the wharf.

He crossed the space between it and the nearest street, and once more was moving toward Dr. Spray's office, with his untold tale of terror.

All at once he became aware that he was not the only person abroad just then.

The wind suddenly wafted to his ears a tread which was not as soft as a panther's. It came behind him, keeping time to his own steps, and he tried to think how near the maker of it was without looking back.

If Sol thought that perhaps the man in his rear was not following him, he was suddenly relieved of this disallusion. He turned a corner and drew his body into a doorway, hugging the door and waiting after the manner of a tiger-cat in ambush.

The footsteps came to the corner and stopped. Sol Sphinx did not look out of his burrow to see what sort of man his tracker was, but held his breath and waited on.

It was but a few feet to the man, and he could have reached him by a sudden spring, but still he did not stir.

"It's queer," said the man on the corner. "He turned this angle, for I saw him. I was watching him when he turned toward the river, and while he talked to the policeman. I'd like to find where he went. It would be something to go home on. I'll try a little further."

The next moment the speaker came toward the house in whose doorway the ferret was hidden. He was looking at the buildings and muttering to himself.

"He may have a hole here, for these detectives are sharper than foxes, and there's no telling where all their dens are," Sol heard him say.

Nearer and nearer to the door came the man. At last he stopped directly in front of it, and should he turn his head to the house he could not help seeing the man he had lost. Not for a moment did Sol lose sight of him now.

"I'll have to go back with nothing to report," the tracker said. "It's too bad, and I had such a good chance, too."

That moment he turned toward the house. The figure of the ferret in the doorway seemed to move outward.

"Great heavens!" cried the spy, falling back, but not soon enough to escape the detective's hand.

In another moment Sol Sphinx held in a grip of iron the astonished man he had been watching, and the detective's look told that he had achieved a great triumph.

"You have found the man you were hunting," said Sol. "You need look no further."

At that moment something fell to the ground with a ringing noise, and instantly sent upward with a glitter the flash of the nearest lamp.

Sol Sphinx looked down, and saw lying at his feet a dagger, whose long blade was slender but deadly-looking. His grip had shaken it from the prisoner's hand.

There was silence when the ferret of New York looked again into the man's face.

"Did your master tell you to hunt me?" queried the detective. "What is to be the next play of the Demon Doctor?"

"Wait and you shall see," came from behind the shut teeth of the prisoner, and beyond this Sol Sphinx could get nothing out of him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FORCED TO DISGORGE.

JILT, the guardian of the detective's room, was fast asleep on his cot when a footstep came up the steps and entered the apartment. It was the ferret himself, and he smiled when he glanced at his watch-dog.

Sol Sphinx was alone, and after a short time he went over to another cot opposite Jilt and dropped into a slumber there. The man of trails needed sleep; he had much work ahead, and his body and brain called for rest.

In a little while the room was quiet again, and before long the first streaks of the new day came, illuminating the whole city and chasing back the shadows of night. Jilt was the first of the twain to rise, and he stared at his master, whose coming had not reached his ears.

"I've got something for him," said Jilt to himself. "He should have seen it sooner, but I did not know he had come and he would not disturb me."

The man drew from his bosom a piece of paper which he unfolded as he crossed the room to Sol's couch.

"This came last night," said Jilt, handing it to the ferret.

"Who brought it, boy?" queried Sol, looking first at the paper and then at the man.

"I can't say."

"Can't say? But it wasn't handed to you in your sleep?"

"No, sir; but it was poked under the door when I came back from the saloon. I found it on the floor, and, seeing that it was addressed to you, I thought I would keep it safe and hand it to you when you came home. But I don't know when you got back, but you have it now safe and sound."

Meantime Sol had opened the note and was reading the writing thereon. Jilt watched him a moment and then withdrew.

He could see that the paper was one of some importance, for Sol read it twice before looking up and when he did so there was a singular gleam in his eyes.

"I guess you know now who fetched it," said Jilt.

"I do not, but never mind; it is of some importance all the same, and I'll see to it at once. Has Morte dropped in since my departure?"

"Haven't seen a sign of him, sir," was the reply. "Seems to me he don't come as often as he used to."

"Maybe not, Jilt," smiled Sol.

Half an hour later Jilt was the only occupant of the room and Sol Sphinx was in another part of the city.

There he was admitted to a house well known to him, and a minute later he was listening to a woman who was talking rapidly.

"It wasn't a very nice time to be on the street, but I couldn't help it," she said. "I left Tressy asleep and she did not know that I was out. I found your door locked and thought I would leave the note under it for you."

The speaker was Mrs. Harlow, and Tressy, the little feather-painter, was at work, but listening.

"What has happened?" asked the detective.

"We've lost the lodger in Room 29."

"What, Brazos Bill?"

"Yes, sir. He is gone."

"When did he go?"

"It was eleven last night and a queer proceeding it was, too. I happened to be at the door when I heard his voice on the stair. I looked up and there he stood as large as life all alone. I thought at first that he had a companion, but he carried a bundle on one arm and perched upon it was the black cat who has been his fellow lodger ever since he came to this house. He was bidding good-by to the old trap we live in, and when I was afraid to look any longer, I drew back and heard him come down."

"And so you think he has gone for good?"

"I can't think otherwise. The room has been plundered of everything belonging to him, for he made our landlord furnish it for him when he came, and so he hadn't much to take away."

"Hardly anything but the cat, eh?"

"The cat and a bundle," smiled Mrs. Harlow.

The sudden departure of Brazos Bill was not so urgent in importance to Sol Sphinx, but it meant something. He held the document which would have been a trump card for the Man from San Lopez; he knew how Quicksilver Dan died—there was no doubt of this—and now he had changed his quarters, going off in the night and leaving not a clew behind.

It was to tell him this that Mrs. Harlow had sent for the detective, taking to his lodgings the note Jilt had found under the door. She thought the event of sufficient importance to communicate at once to Sol, and his look while he listened to her told her that it was not entirely worthless in his eyes.

When he had heard her through Sol went up to the room lately inhabited by Brazos Bill. The man and his cat were gone, but he had barely closed the door than he saw a line of ragged writing on one of the dirty side-walls.

The ferret went closer and with a smile read as follows:

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONSNARN:—

"This is to sartify that I have gone West to grow up with the kentry. I've had enough of this infernal city. It's no place for a man like yours truly,

"BILL BLODGETT."

"That is a lie written to deceive," said Sol when he had made out the message left behind.

"A man with the prize I think he has on his person isn't going to quit this city while a woman with thousands at her command is able to pay well for it. This is a pretty little trick, Brazos Bill, but you have overdone the act."

Nothing else rewarded the detective's visit to the room, and with a last look at the inscription on the wall, he went back to Harlow's.

"I want you to keep ears and eyes open," said he. "If the woman in the vail comes here I want to know it. She will come: she will want to see for herself."

"Tressy and I will watch," was the reply and the following moment Sol was on the street once more.

"So Bill has turned fox, has he?" he mused. "He has been threatened by the woman of the avenue—the once beautiful Queen of San Lopez. He wants to keep out of her way, for he knows something about her power, and that she has for an ally the Demon Doctor of New York. I must find this runaway. I must see Brazos Bill before she finds him, for she won't believe the writing he left on the wall, no more than I do."

Sol was not far from the tall rookery when he saw a man slip past him and cast a quick look back.

"That's my man," cried the ferret. "He's been on the watch," and the next moment he was watching the man who had hastened on and was anxious to get away.

A few steps further on the watched one dodged into a drinking establishment and Sol, after sauntering past it and seeing that his man did not come out, walked back and entered also.

Back of the main room was a smaller apartment and thither he bent his steps, at the same time signaling the waiter to follow him with a glass of beer.

The little room was dark, but it was not empty. At a table sat the man he had seen on the street and the detective without any ado dropped into a chair opposite him.

For a moment there was stare and counter-stare, when Sol broke the silence.

"You haven't started West yet, I see."

A grin overspread the face across the table.

"What's that to you?" he growled.

"It's more to you, may be," was the answer.

"To me? How?"

The hand of the detective fell upon the brown wrist of Brazos Bill, and their eyes met again.

"If you go you'll be out of her way, don't you see?" he said. "She wants something that you have, and she wants it bad enough to give you some trouble."

"You know, don't you? I'd like to see any one keep anything from a lynx like you."

Sol smiled.

"I don't think you've tried very hard to keep it. Did you leave the message on the wall for her?"

"For any one who might see it."

"I guess I saw it first. You don't intend to go West?"

"I'm far enough West now."

"Did she threaten you, Brazos?"

In an instant the countenance of the man across the beer table changed. His eyes got a mad gleam, and he struck the board with his fist.

"I wish you could have seen her," he cried. "It was better acting than you see at the theaters. I am to meet death when I don't look for the monster. It is to come quick and in some terrible shape. She's got some deadly weapon in her hands and, then, she has a friend who can do the impossible."

"The Demon Doctor?"

"The handsome sawbones who can chat in half the languages of the world, and kill in just as many ways, too, I guess. She told me that I could take my choice of two things—life or death. In other words, I could sell her what I've got at her own terms, or tumble dead some time when I thought everything was O. K."

"And you chose—"

"I walked off with my prize and took death!"

Brazos Bill was smiling while he talked, but the detective could see that he was sending suspicious glances toward the door, as if he expected to see it open and admit a foe.

"Why didn't you sell to her? You have served that woman before now."

"Served her, did you say?"

"Yes; she has been to see you often at the old house. You knew her before she became the wife of Parke Newport, the millionaire."

"By heavens, I did, but I'm not the only man in this city who knew her then. No man ever saw San Lopez who has not heard of Queen Medea. I saw her there and that's why she came to my house. Old acquaintanceship you see."

"Then, you knew the value of the paper which was lost but which Quicksilver Dan was supposed to have secreted somewhere?"

"Of course I knew."

"But you did not discover it?"

"No. He found it—he, the man she wrecked in Arizona. He came hither to get even, but what did he find when he got here?"

"He found Dan dead."

"There was no answer to this."

"He found that the man who was the lawful husband of this woman had died suddenly in his little room in the house where you dwelt."

"I'll admit that Dan died thar."

"You knew that he was living there; you was watching him for her."

"But I didn't have a hand in the other matter."

"No? And yet you were in her pay."

Brazos Bill leaned half-way across the table.

"I didn't have a hand in it—I swear I didn't. He died when I wasn't in the house. When I came back the soul of Dan Dalton had passed to its Maker."

"But you know who saw him just before that."

The lips across the table came together and the detective watched the stern play of the dark features of the man from the Far West.

"I'm not in court," suddenly growled Brazos Bill. "I don't have ter tell what I know."

He pushed back his chair and was moving to get up when something he was not looking for came up over the edge of the table.

"Sit down!" said Sol Sphinx, speaking over the barrel of his revolver. "I want a few

more words with you. If you want to go West and grow up with the country you must listen to me. You know me."

"Don't I?"

"You have entered my room and taken therefrom that which was not yours. You robbed the Man from San Lopez of the document which is of so much value to him and to the woman on the avenue. You have it now on your person. I will take it."

"You?"

"I—Sol Sphinx."

"What is it to you?"

"More than you think."

"Oh, you have been helping Morte play his game of revenge. What he has lost you think you can find. What if I should refuse to surrender what you think I have?"

"Then you shall march from this room to another from which you will, in time, seek another still, where you will answer for a crime which may stretch a neck."

Brazos Bill looked into the muzzle of the six-shooter and grinned half-fearlessly.

"May be if I give this paper Jonah up I may escape the death she threatened," he said. "There it is! Now I am out of the game, and Black Cactus and I can lead respectable lives hereafter. Is that enough? I am off. Be careful how you fool with Medea and the Demon Doctor," and touching his hat with a mock grin, the man walked from the room leaving Sol Sphinx to laugh over the bit of paper he had left behind.

CHAPTER XXV.

FREED FROM THE VISE.

IN spite of his loss Brazos Bill laughed to himself when he left the little room where he had been plundered of the paper which he might have sold to Estelle Newport in the elegant seclusion of her mansion.

"How would it do let her know that it's passed out o' my hands?" he said. "If I could convince her of this may be I wouldn't be hounded down by her and the doctor. But it will never do to go and tell her in person."

He kept on until he reached a store where he saw some stationery displayed in a window and entering he made a purchase which he carried off to a dingy apartment in a building very like the one from which he had lately moved.

Mounting the stairs to the top floor he unlocked a door and greeted a huge cat which whined at his coming.

"I come home poorer than I went off, Cactus," said Bill. "I've been robbed and right in broad daylight at that. But mebber it's all for the best. I've lost the record of Queen Medea's marriage to Quicksilver Dan, and didn't get a dollar for it. Well, it was that or go to prison and leave you without a protector, and so I thought I'd let 'er go."

Bill now seated himself at the table and began to write. The table was rough and his pencil a mere stub, and between these drawbacks, assisted by his big hands he wrote to Mrs. Newport telling her that he had lost the document and that it was then in the hands of another person, Sol Sphinx, the detective of Gotham.

Bill closed the note by saying that he and Black Cactus had resolved to become honest people and invited her to transfer the terrible death to some other enemy, as he desired to live, though he would not betray her secret.

He posted his letter in the nearest mail box and went back to the new quarters.

"That's off my mind," said he. "I don't care what happens now, but I wouldn't object if she transfers her deadly blow to the man what robbed me. The paper will fall back into Morte's hands and some of these days the people of New York will have a genuine sensation; but I won't be in it—not now."

Meantime the man who had achieved a triumph in the beer-room had returned to his own little quarters.

No Morte yet. He was nonplused by the absence of the Man from San Lopez. He had something to show him now; he had recovered the trump card, and Estelle Newport and her companion in the double plot might well tremble.

This time the document was hidden where the sharpest eye could not ferret it out, and Sol Sphinx went out again.

"Now for a look into one of two new mysteries," said he. "I let Danton go, for to arrest him now means the frightening of the birds and the probable loss of the game. Yes, I let him go and yet if I had not heard him at my heels I might have felt a dagger in my back. The young man is under the spells of the Demon Doctor; he was following me at the bidding of his master; but, thanks to the ears I carry, I heard him and saw the dagger drop upon the pavement."

A few minutes later the detective dropped into Dr. Spray's office, and found Marciel Poynter there. The young man was pale and anxious, his countenance showing that he had passed hours of intense agony since Pearl's disappearance, and at sight of the detective he sprang up and clutched his arm.

"What news do you bring me of her?" he cried. "You have been on the trail. Like myself, you have not slept since our terrible discovery. Tell me where she is."

"I can tell you nothing, as yet," answered Sol. "We must go about this deliberately. You must not forget with whom we are contending."

"I wish I could forget," cried Marciel. "I wish I could blot from my mind all thoughts of the Demon Doctor. And Pearl is back in his power; she is once more perhaps in the house from which I persuaded her to fly, and that means but one thing for her—death!"

There was no reply. Sol and the doctor looked at one another, and when Marciel had been persuaded to lie down and take the rest he needed, and the two were alone, the detective said:

"I shall re-enter that house again. I shall brave the devilry of the Demon Doctor. This game must be played out within the next few hours. The life of the beautiful victim of the plot demands that it should be."

"But you will be watched for now. Danton has told his story ere this—"

"I doubt that, doctor."

"Why shouldn't he tell it?"

"Because he failed. If he had succeeded, he might rejoice to tell it; but he lost his dagger, and his master would brook no failure at this stage of the game."

"There is something in that sort of reasoning," said Dr. Spray. "If the youth is the slave of the doctor's mysterious power he will shrink from telling his failure."

"I think so; still, I will be looked for. I am the stumbling-block now."

"Beware of the powers of the man who studied the mysteries of the Indies."

"I enter the lair of this tiger with all my wits about me."

Sol Sphinx had risen and stood before the doctor.

"See that the youth in yon room commits no indiscretion in his present frame of mind. Let me play my card. I will not fail. Why not? Because I have never failed before!"

Dr. Spray held out his hand, which the detective took, and the next moment Sol Sphinx was gone.

He went down the doctor's steps with a smile lurking at his lips, and walked off as if he had no mission of life and death in his mind.

He chose the hour of noon for his work. He crossed the city to the vicinity of Dr. Jallien's office, which he watched until he saw the handsome figure of its master come down the front steps and move off.

There was a certain springiness to the Demon Doctor's step, and his head was held high as he walked down the pave.

Sol followed him until he saw him take a car, after which he came back and ran up the stoop of the house of mystery.

Mazie opened the door.

"Doctor Jallien has just gone out," said the maid.

"Yes, I met him on the corner. I am to wait in the office until he returns."

The girl held the door open and Sol entered. Passing into the office he drew a chair up to the grate and picked up a paper. He was alone; but what if there were spies in the house? What if the eye of the man he had stopped on the street the previous night, skulking Danton, was fixed upon him?

But to all outward appearances the man reading in the office was an ordinary person who had called to see the famous doctor on professional business, and could not be a detective.

An hour passed before Sol moved. The paper was read through and another was found on the doctor's table.

When he did stir it was to throw a glance around the room. There was a door at one side; it led into another part of the house and was shut. Was it locked? Sol knew that beyond this door was the stair which he had climbed to the laboratory, and he still retained a very vivid recollection of his adventure there.

He crossed the room at last and tried the door. It opened and he found himself near the bottom of the steps.

Where was Mazie, the maid?

Opening the stair door, Sol slipped up the flight and was midway when he heard a voice below.

"When did he go away?" said the tones. "I left him in the office a minute ago and he was immersed in a paper. Well, if he don't want to wait till the doctor comes back he can go about his business and come another time."

The detective on the stair smiled to himself. The girl believed that he had quitted the house and he could move on. This he did at once, reaching the top of the flight unmolested.

He more than half believed that if Pearl had been abducted by the Demon Doctor she was in the house somewhere—that she had not been taken home; he intended to search the place as much as possible during its owner's absence.

He soon appeared at the door of the laboratory but did not try to open it. Another door somewhat smaller stood just across the little hall from it, and to it he turned.

All at once a man's voice beyond the door held the detective spellbound. There was, despite the tones, a strange familiarity in the voice, and he held his breath.

Some one was in the room beyond. Sol Sphinx tried the knob, but the door was locked.

"I can't stand this much longer. This is worse than a thousand deaths! In God's name, why didn't I die with my boots on at San Lopez?"

These words, heard distinctly, grated terribly on the ferret's ears.

"Who would use such language but Morte?" he cried, and drawing back a step he looked up at the top of the door and saw the scanty transom there with the cross-piece which seemed to invite a grasp.

The following minute the figure of Sol Sphinx was hanging along the door, and his eyes were at the edge of the transom.

What did he see? The room beyond him was small, but well lighted. He saw that it had at the time a single occupant, a tall man who stood at a work-bench grasping a vise and with the horror of coming death on his face.

It was the Man from San Lopez!

For a moment Sol hung along the door gazing at the strange but terrible sight, for he could see that some agency held the man at the vise, and then he dropped cat-like to the floor.

The stair was at his feet and he looked down for a moment.

"I must get in there," he said, returning to the door, and drawing back he launched his body against the portal, shaking it to its hinges, but not forcing it in.

If he could have looked into the room immediately after his attack he would have seen the haggard face of the prisoner of the vise turned imploringly toward him.

The sound of his attack seemed to echo all over the house. In a moment the stair-door opened and the detective drawing back saw the face of Mazie, the maid, there.

"I wonder what that was?" asked the girl in audible tones. "I certainly heard a noise upstairs."

Then she came up to see what had alarmed her, and the detective watched her like a cat. When she reached the top of the steps she was suddenly seized by a hand that seemed to sink into her arm, and she found herself the prisoner of the man she had admitted to the house.

"You're a robber!" cried Mazie with a white face. "You got in here with a falsehood."

"Never mind that. I want the keys to yon door."

"I don't carry them."

"Who is in there?"

"No one, sir."

It was evident that the girl was telling what she thought was the truth. The Demon Doctor had kept from her the secret of the room.

"But the key," persisted Sol Sphinx. "I must have it."

"I say I haven't got it and I don't know where it is kept."

"Are you alone in the house?"

"I am."

"Where is Danton?"

"I don't know. He hasn't been in, to my knowledge, for two days."

Sol looked at the door again and released the trembling maid. He drew off a pace and summoned all his strength; then, while Mazie held her breath, he went at the portal like the stone of a catapult.

This time the door broke; the lock flew half-way across the room beyond, and the figure of the detective of New York fell headlong across the threshold.

"Just in the nick of time, eh, Morte?" cried Sol, recovering and springing toward the man in the clutch of the vise.

"Don't touch me—don't, for God's sake!" was the answering cry. "I am a prisoner."

But Sol had already caught Morte's arm, and had felt a shock which, in a flash, seemed to tingle every nerve in his body.

"You must find and cut the connecting wire. I haven't been able to locate it while dying here by inches. It may be under the bench, Sol. Sol, was there ever such demonism like this?"

The detective looked everywhere for the wire, but could not see it.

"The battery must be in the Demon Doctor's laboratory," said the Man from San Lopez.

The ferret sprung from the room, and a crash told that he had forced another door. He found the devilish instrument of torture there; he severed a wire with a hatchet, and heard a cry which rung through the whole house.

He knew what it meant.

Morte of Arizona was no longer the prisoner of the steel vise!

Sol Sphinx threw down the hatchet and bounded from the chamber of secrets. The next moment he was staring at a man lying on his face at the foot of the bench.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HAWK AND TIGRESS.

IF, instead of entering the Demon Doctor's house the detective had followed that individual, he might have witnessed a somewhat different scene than the one he was called upon to face. He would have seen Dr. Jallien pass up the steps of the Newport mansion, to be admitted by Estelle herself.

The hour was high noon, and the avenue shone in the glinting rays of the March sun.

Dr. Jallien drew his gloves as he entered the warm parlor, and dropped into a chair. There was a deep smile of triumph on his handsome face.

"You have just come from your latest catch?" said Mrs. Newport. "How fares he now?"

"He still clings to his new friend, the vise," was the reply. "He never had a friend like it."

The woman laughed.

"When will the end come?" she asked.

"I can prolong the torture indefinitely. I can hold him there until he drops dead from actual starvation."

"Hold him till then! That man has been the bane of my existence. He has hounded me across the continent, and would not hesitate to destroy me here."

"He is one of these tigers I have heard about, but never seen before. You know more about them, for you have lived among them. Were there many like him at San Lopez?"

"It was a den of the beasts," said Estelle. "He was no better, no worse, than the rest."

Dr. Jallien would have spoken again if the ring of the postman had not called Mrs. Newport to the door, and when she came back she carried a letter between her dainty fingers.

The Demon Doctor watched her break the seal, and the next instant he heard a cry of horror, and saw that every vestige of color had vanished from her face.

"Merciful God! the fiend has lost the document!" she cried.

"What is that?" smiled the doctor.

Estelle was breathing hard, and her hand was clutching the letter, which had fallen like a thunderbolt from a clear sky.

"Read for yourself and then strike," said she, handing it to her companion. "He did keep his word, but not in the manner I expected. Indeed, I looked for him back, ready to accept my proposition; but he has given the paper into the hands of the bitterest enemy we have."

Dr. Jallien was quietly reading the letter which we have seen Brazos Bill indite shortly after his encounter with Sol Sphinx.

"I don't think he gave it up of his own free will," remarked the Demon Doctor. "There was too much in sight for him to do this. He was robbed by force. The detective was too much for the tiger from the West."

"But he must not hold it!" cried Estelle. "This man-hunter must not be allowed to retain his prize."

"Certainly not," answered Dr. Jallien.

"He must be netted at once."

"But you seem to forget that these fellows are hard to net. They don't run into every trap that is set for them."

"What, do you think you are not a match for this one?" cried the millionaire's wife.

"I have made no such confession. I never make them."

The lips of the Demon Doctor were wreathed in a curious smile.

"He will press his advantage," said Estelle. "This ferret who has been fighting us ever since Morte came into the game, will now play another hand. He knows the value of the paper he has secured. Why wasn't it found when the little room in the tenement was searched?"

"He hid it beyond reach of all eyes."

"No, the eye of Morte found it," broke in the woman, who was watching the Demon Doctor like a cat. "I had a chance once to keep him out of this game. It was in the West, and there were no eyes on the trail but ours."

"Woman, you missed a great opportunity then."

There was no reply, but Estelle looked away and sighed.

"You know now whom you have got to meet, and at once," she said, when her gaze came back to Dr. Jallien. "With this detective out of the way, nothing stands between us and success. He is the only obstacle—the only rock in the path."

The Demon Doctor toyed with his glove and then took from his bosom a little object, at sight of which the hand of Estelle leaped across the space that separated their chairs, but Dr. Jallien drew it away.

"Where did you get that?" she cried.

A smile overspread the doctor's face.

"I found it awhile ago. Did you ever see it before?"

The speaker held between thumb and finger, but in full view, a ring with a singular setting. The eyes of the woman were fastened upon it, and her breath came in gasps.

"Where did you get it?" she demanded.

"Please be quiet, madam," was the answer.

"I say I found it."

"Not in this city. Morte had it concealed on his person."

"Why should he have it?"

Parke Newport's wife fell back in her chair and stared at the ring.

"Is it yours, madam?" quietly asked the Demon Doctor. "Did you ever wear it?"

"Never mind. I ask where you got it."

Claude Jallien crossed his legs and continued to look at the woman before him, but with the eye of the tiger which finds the prey in his

power, but which likes to toy with it before its destruction.

"Some rings," said he, "have strange adventures. They pass through a number of hands and come back sometimes to plague their owners."

His single auditor did not seem to see him; her gaze was riveted on the ring.

"This ring has been in this city for a long time."

"How long?"

"That is hard to tell. It was here before you came, madam."

"Did you bring it here to tell me this, and then to stop where you are?"

"What, do you really want the story?" smiled the Demon Doctor. "I can tell it, though I think it would be no more news to you than was the narrative of Queen Medea span in this very room by the detective of New York. Twenty years ago, a man who was well known in the Southwest—a rich ranch-owner named Bardelan lost his only child, a daughter. He did not lose her at the hands of the red Apaches who swarm there, but she had simply run off with a young adventurer, whose handsome face had captivated her girlish fancy. The pair crossed the Mexican frontier and were married, the groom placing on the fingers of his bride the ring I hold in my hand."

"For a time all went well with the young couple. The husband, a lucky man with the cards, threw and won great sums at the various places they visited. But the end which comes to nearly all such people came to him. He was caught cheating one night in one of the mining-camps just over the American border, and the next day the wife saw him laid away in the little graveyard on the side of the mountain. She tarried there a while, and with her babe disappeared suddenly, and the miners thought she had gone back home and asked forgiveness there, but she had done nothing of the kind. I will tell you what this woman did. She sold her child."

A slight cry from the white lips of the woman watching Doctor Jallien caused him to smile, but it did not break for a second the thread of his story.

"Yes, the woman actually sold her child. She found a rancher who wanted an heir, and for a few dollars she gave him the little one and started out to become a noted woman on the frontier. She had youth and beauty and made many conquests, but never gave a thought to the little one she had sold. She had married very young, as was the fashion in the Southwest, and had a long life of pleasure before her. By-and-by she turned up at a camp called San Lopez and made her last Western conquest there. Shall I stop here, madam?"

Mrs. Newport said nothing for a moment.

"You know where to stop," she spoke at last. "But why have you gone over all this—to tell me that the ring you hold in your hand is the one the mother left with the child you say she sold?"

"What a diviner you are," smiled the Demon Doctor. "Yes, this ring is that one. Isn't it strange that after these years it should fall into my hands, and of all places here in New York?"

"Any thing is possible with you," said Estelle.

"Let me see the ring."

Again she put out her hand for the bauble, but the doctor drew it away as before.

"Madam, what became of the child?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"As its mother were you so busy playing your part in the deadly drama of the mining-camp that you had no time to look after your own flesh and blood?"

She seemed to recoil from the eyes of Dr. Jallien; at any rate, she sunk into the depths of her chair.

"I have concluded to restore this ring to its rightful owner," he resumed after a brief pause.

In an instant Estelle's face brightened.

"I have concluded to give it back to its rightful heir—to the child from whom it was taken awhile ago."

A cry which she could not keep back though she had nerved herself for anything, broke over the woman's lips.

"Where is that child?" she cried. "Have you, too, risen against me? Must I fight you with the rest of them?"

How she had changed! How quickly the beauty of her countenance had altered, and how, with the eyes of a serpent flashing their baleful and deadly light upon the man who had been her ally, she looked at the Demon Doctor.

In another instant she was upon her feet, her figure drawn regally up and her gaze riveted upon the cool man in the chair.

"Where is this child?" she repeated.

"My dear Estelle, I am nearly out of money," said the Demon Doctor.

The handsome woman bit her lips till they showed signs of coming blood.

"How much do you want?" she asked.

"I would not come to you if I did not actually need a certain sum for a certain purpose," he replied.

"How much?"

"I can use two thousand now."

Without another word Estelle walked over to her *secretaire* and seated herself there.

All the time the doctor was watching her like a hawk. He saw her draw a check-book from a pigeon-hole and write for a moment. When she came back she held the check in her hand.

"This is what you want. Now I will take the ring."

But once more the velvet hand of the Demon Doctor drew it beyond her reach and the blood instantly mounted to her temples.

"What, do you still refuse to surrender it?" she cried. "Then the check remains mine!"

She looked toward the fire in the grate, and with sudden motion tore the check in twain and threw the two halves into the flames.

This display of anger made the doctor laugh.

"Just as you wish," said he. "This ring is of great value to the person who lost it last. Madam, I will take the check or it may go back to that person along with a secret which, as yet, is known to but two people in New York."

She understood the meaning of his last sentence. Never before, perhaps, did she realize the coolness and villainy of the man with whom she had plotted. He had the well-kept secret of her early life; he knew where dwelt the child of her young years, the babe she sold after the death of her gambler husband. It was a secret as dread as the one possessed by the Man from San Lopez, and her blood seemed to turn to fire as she thought of it.

While she looked at him grinning in his chair with the face of a demon, the nerve of Medea of the Mines came back to her. She was no longer the petted wife of the New York nabob, but the beautiful tigress who had played for high stakes among the mining-camps of the Southwest.

All at once she swooped down upon the Demon Doctor. She fell upon him with the suddenness of a springing tiger, and before he could twist out of his seat and resist, her white hands were sinking into his throat and she forgot everything but the recovery of the gold bauble which he had displayed to his own danger.

"It is mine! I will have it or life," cried Estelle. "I will possess the ring, or you shall never discover another secret of life and death!"

She gained her point; she tore from his hand the ring, and falling back held it up to his gaze with a laugh of triumph; but the Demon Doctor, springing up after her, covered her with his velvet hand and exclaimed:

"Madam, your triumph has ruined you!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DESTROYER TURNS HEALER.

THE six words of the Demon Doctor provoked another laugh from the beautiful creature before him.

"Laugh while you may," he continued. "Ere long you will look for that help which will not come. I repeat that your success has ruined you."

He retreated to the door, the woman still a statue in the middle of the room. He laid his silken hand on the knob and looked at her a full minute.

"Good-by, child-seller," said he. "We may never meet again, but you have not parted for good with Doctor Jallien."

The next moment the door opened and closed on the figure of the Demon Doctor, and Estelle was left in the sumptuous parlor with the ring in her hand.

Dr. Jallien went down the steps and cast a look back at the house. A strange smile came to his face and the eyes seemed to glitter as if he were standing over some victim of his marvelous power.

"Verily she shall bear from me," he said under his breath, and then walked away.

He bent his steps toward his own house, dreamless of the events that had transpired there in his absence. He went in and uncloaked himself in the warm office.

A few minutes later he touched a silver call-bell, but no one came. Presently he rung again but with the same result.

"Where is Mazie?" he exclaimed. "Has the foolish girl again invaded forbidden ground?"

He turned from the room and found in the hall a note on a chair.

It was addressed to to him, and in an instant he was reading it aloud:

"I can't remain after what has happened, though I am not to blame. I did not know that there was a man in the little room on the third floor. Forgive me and think often that I have tried to serve you well."
MAZIE.

Instinctively Dr. Jallien looked up the stair, and saw that the door at the top of the flight stood wide. In a moment he was going up, three steps at a bound, and all at once rushed into the room which had been Morte's prison.

It was empty now; there was no man at the steel vise. The Man from San Lopez no longer groaned while he waited for the most terrible of deaths.

White as a sheet, the Demon Doctor sprang from his room and rushed into the laboratory

adjoining and at once saw what had taken place there.

"Did the girl do this?" he asked himself. "How could she force the door? It has been broken down by a charge; she had not strength enough for that."

Dr. Jallien was puzzled until he came back to the office. He went all over the house and came back to the fire in the grate and rubbed his hands there.

"I will get on the trail while it is fresh," said he, throwing on his cloak again. "She hasn't lost her talent and she shall track him for me. As for Mazie, she can go; she is harmless for she fears my power, though she did pluck up courage and run off."

Ten minutes later the Demon Doctor of New York was on the streets once more, and his rapid steps soon brought him to a quiet-looking house, which he entered.

In one of the rooms beyond the shuttered windows a light cry greeted him, and the outlines of a young girl appeared in the dusk that prevailed.

"Did you think I had left you altogether?" asked the man, going forward and looking down into the face that seemed to shrink from his eyes.

"I did not know what you had done," was the answer.

"I want you to perform a little service for me."

"For you?" cried the girl. "I wish I could not track for any one. I am weak and I want to die."

"Not yet," laughed the Demon Doctor. "Life will become joy by and by. It will not be always thus with you, and you will not have to inhabit this house very long."

"Will I ever be permitted to go back to my old quarters?"

"One of these days," smiled the doctor. "But now let me give you the clue."

The girl would have refused the hand he put forward, but he found her fingers and looked down into her eyes.

"I want you to watch my office," said he. "You know where it is and how it looks. The hour is about noon. Are you watching now?"

"I see the house," said the girl.

"Who comes to it? Any one?"

"A man has just been admitted by the girl. He goes to the office and picks up the papers one by one. Now he quits the office and is in the hall."

"What is he like?"

"He is tall and rather handsome. A darkish beard covers his face."

"Is the beard real?"

"You ask me too much now," and a faint smile swept over the white face in the chair.

"Follow the man, then."

Kate Ravelin—the girl in the Demon Doctor's power was the fair fortune-teller of New York—went on and followed Sol Sphinx the ferret up the stair to the door of Morte's prison. She showed him to the doctor hanging along the portal looking down upon the Man from San Lopez, described how he captured Mazie when she came up the steps, and how he forced the door and released the prisoner of the infernal vise.

"Don't lose sight of him for a moment now," eagerly cried the doctor. "You must track the two men from the house and show me where they are now."

It was evident that the girl was overtaking her powers, and that nothing but the mysterious influence of the man who stood over her kept her on the trail.

Sentence after sentence fell from her tongue while she was watched like a hawk and when she followed Morte and his rescuer up the stair that led to Sol Sphinx's room, the doctor withdrew his hand and uttered a cry of victory.

"Splendid!" he cried. "You deserve a medal for your service."

But the girl did not seem to hear him. Her eyes were shut and she lay back in the chair a picture of exhaustion.

In a moment Dr. Jallien took a small case from his pocket and selecting from it a vial, dropped something from it upon Kate's lips and in a second her eyes opened.

"Did I find the trail?" she asked with a smile.

"You did well," was the answer. "I will not forget it, and ere long you will receive your reward."

"But tell me who I am. You know," said the girl.

"What, are you a mystery unto yourself?"

"I am. I am Kate the waif; I have no knowledge of a childhood. One day I found myself in this city. It was long ago, though sometimes I seem to have a recollection of a southern home; but it is so misty that it affords me no pleasure."

For a minute the Demon Doctor looked at the girl and smiled.

"The time has not come for the revelation," he said.

"Will it ever come?"

"Yes."

"Then I ought to be content to wait."

"Wait."

"If I could hear about my mother," sighed the girl. "If I could know whose lips first kissed me—"

"You might not want to know this," broke in the Demon Doctor. "You might shrink from the very knowledge you seek."

"No, no. One does not shrink from one's mother. That is not natural."

There was no answer.

Dr. Jallien now drew back and once more adjusted his cloak. The gaze of the girl was fixed upon him. She followed him with her eyes across the room, and when he moved toward the door she left the chair and came forward.

"God pardon me, but I can't wait for that revelation," cried she. "I must know before you quit this room. You know all about my parentage. You are a man of secrets and marvelous power; you have robbed me of the talent I had once—the one by which I traced people in a trance. I do not regret its loss. Better, perhaps, if I had never possessed it. But you must tell me now."

She stood imploringly before him, and the next instant his dark eyes regarded her while he kept silence.

Slowly the figure of the girl seemed to shrink. All color left her face, and watching him she fell back step by step until she sunk into the chair like one dead.

The Demon Doctor looked at her awhile longer and then glided to the door.

"Foolish girl," said he, "you want too know too much. The time for this terrible revelation has not come, though it maybe near at hand. What! tell you in your present state about your mother? No, I cannot do that. It would be for your future happiness if you never learned."

With this he opened the door and passed out, leaving Kate in the chair the picture of death. He went down the steps outside and hurried off. The Demon Doctor bent his head to the wind that swept the street and did not pause until he was back in the little office he had quitted some time before.

He occupied it but a short time when he passed up to the laboratory the door of which he shut and locked. He had reached the room of secrets and wanted no spies; and none he had.

When he came out of that chamber the sun had kissed the waters of the bay in its setting and shadows were falling once more over the streets of New York. Dr. Jallien slipped from his house by the rear door and hurried off. Few would have noticed him in the man whose features were concealed by the high collar of a cloak, and by the hat which was pulled over his eyes.

Was he going back to the girl who had tracked Sol Sphinx for him?

Half an hour after quitting his house he ran up the steps of another house many squares from Kate's new abode and entered with the aid of a key.

This time he confronted another young girl as beautiful as Kate the seeress, but quite a different person. She shivered when she saw the Demon Doctor cross the threshold of the little room she occupied and watched him imploringly.

"You are better now, are you not?" he asked in a soft voice.

"Why ask me this?" was the answer. "I will never be better while I am in your power. Take all I am worth and give me back the health of which I have been robbed. You can do it, for you can almost raise the dead."

"You overrate my skill," was the answer, accompanied by a smile.

"But you have brought me to this and why?—that she who is my father's wife may profit by my death. Don't say nay, Doctor Jallien. I know all. It was a dark day when that woman entered our home. Why did my father love her?"

"It is a mystery," said the Demon Doctor.

"Why did he let her ruin another's life?"

The girl in the reclining chair looked strangely at the man who had uttered these words.

"You have just asked at my hands a boon which I am going to grant," he went on. "I have come to give you back the vigor you have lost."

She looked at him with a smile of incredulity on her lips. What, life at the hands of the man who had sapped her fragile organization with some mysterious power known only to him? It could not be. He was deceiving her again.

"You don't believe," said he. "You don't give me credit for one truthful word."

"Why should I, doctor?"

He walked over to the table and sat down. Pearl Newport watched him as never before had she watched any one. She saw him set two little vials side by side and from one he took something which he added to the contents of the other.

He had promised life—he the man who was in Estelle Newport's pay, yet he might be issuing out death. Nothing was too deep and damnable for the Demon Doctor.

After awhile he came back to her, holding in one of his soft hands one of the vials. Pearl recoiled.

"It is life. I swear it by all that is holy," said he. "Time will show that for once even Doctor Jallien told the truth. Take it, child, and live; refuse and die!"

Looking up into his face which had lost much

of its terror for her within the last moment, Pearl held out her thin hand, and seizing the vial emptied it, feeling instantly in her blood a fire she had not felt there for months.

"Why should you save me—of all men you?" she asked.

"Live and see," was the answer.

"Are you not still her friend?"

There was no reply, but Pearl thought she caught a quick flash in the fine dark eyes as the Demon Doctor drew back the little table.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STING OF THE SERPENT.

SOL SPHINX had much to communicate to the man he had rescued from the grip of the steel vise.

He did not tell him all until he had conducted him to the little office on Broadway where he had a surprise for him in the paper which he had taken from Brazos Bill—the hunted marriage-certificate which had nearly cost two men their lives.

The Man from San Lopez uttered a loud cry when he saw the document and declared that he would face Estelle yet that day.

"And fall in a swoon again by some of the Demon Doctor's infernal magic?" asked Sol smiling across the table at which they sat. "Don't be a fool, Morte. This is a game of life and death, especially of the latter."

"But she may run away."

"That woman, backed as she is by Doctor Jallien? You cannot have studied her. She will remain and fight."

"When it is discovered that I have escaped the second time from the trap?"

"Even after such discovery."

"And the doctor?"

"Oh, he will simply look you up and try again. The next time it may not be a vise."

"Poison, eh?" cried the Arizonian.

"Perhaps."

The miner drummed on the table a moment and then looked into the detective's face.

"I don't want many more experiences like those I have already had," he grinned. "I believe I would go back to the mines first. There I never had a woman hunting me and there were no demon doctors to entrap a man. But what about the woman who went to the river—the girl who read peoples minds while she appeared to sleep and who tracked in a trance? She told me once that she was a waif. What do you know about Kate?"

"Not much. She never knew much about her own life; but the Demon Doctor seemed to hold the whole secret of it. I noticed that when you first saw her you started, as if her face were familiar. What did it mean?"

"At first sight she looked like a woman I knew years ago—the young wife of a frontier gambler who got shot for cheating in one of the camps. After the shooting the wife, who was a beautiful creature, as reckless as her husband, sold the child to a rancher and went off. When Queen Medea came to San Lopez I started just as I did when I saw Kate, for she reminded me of the child-selling widow, though she told me once that Quicksilver Dan was her first husband. These resemblances often puzzle one; they have puzzled me a great deal, but this isn't getting even with the Demon Doctor."

"It is interesting to me, though," said the detective. "I always was interested in Kate Ravelin, and now more than ever."

"After she is dead."

"Who calls her dead?"

Morte fell back and stared at Sol Sphinx.

"Look at the note you found at her house—the one in which she bade you good-by and said she was going to the river to escape the mysterious power of the man who has exerted such influence over her. That ought to convince a very stubborn man."

"But they have not found her, and the harbor police usually find the body of a suicide."

"Then you have changed your mind?"

"The girl is not dead," said the ferret firmly. "She is somewhere alive in the grasp of the power she has feared so long."

"In the hands of Doctor Jallien?"

"I believe so. I am convinced that she wrote that note under the spell. The girl was tracking for us, though her powers were failing. She found the trail of the man who visited Pearl Newport's retreat and despoiled it; she was getting back some of her lost vitality, it seemed to me, but it might not last long."

"But you have no clew to her whereabouts?"

"I shall find one."

"But at the same time you must be on your guard. There may be another dagger at your heels."

The detective laughed.

"Do you think Danton will repeat his play? The young man was nicely caught, and when I let him go he gave me a look I shall never forget. I think he was thankful despite his last words."

"But as long as he remains in the Demon Doctor's power that long will he serve his master."

"It may be so, Morte."

"Of course he went back to the house?"

"I think not. I saw him to-day."

"After you again?"

"No; he was watching me as if he wanted to speak, yet feared to. I believe Danton is tired at last of the service he has done."

At that moment footsteps came up the stair and the next second a young man confronted the detective and his companion.

"Look, there he is now!" cried the Man from San Lopez, pointing at the person on the threshold.

Danton was there, and when he came forward with his gaze fastened upon the ferret he smiled as if he recalled their last meeting.

"I have come to say that I am sorry," said he. "I want to get out of the toils in which I have been for years. I want to break from the net of the Demon Doctor."

"By Jove you war right!" exclaimed Morte looking at Sol. "He's repented, if it's genuine, and I'll help him all I can."

Danton turned to Morte and held out his effeminate hand which the Arizonian covered with his big yellowish palm.

"You can't know how intense is the desire I have just voiced," he went on. "I want to begin life over. I will if I have half a chance. I want to get out of the shadow of this Satan in broadcloth."

Danton had seated himself at the table and was talking with feeling.

"You can't know him as I do. I have served him ten years—he took me when a child and made me his watch-dog, spy and slave. He has the fascinating powers of a beautiful serpent. When you are in his snare you can't resist him. His power even follow you abroad and you will dog the steps of any person like a hound—like I dogged yours the other night."

"Couldn't you get out of the influence?" queried Morte.

"Can a moth keep out of the light which dazzles it?" was the quick response, and Danton turned full upon the speaker. "It is impossible, I tell you."

"The doctor's a dangerous man."

"He is more than that."

"Has this tiger whom you have served but the one lair?" asked the detective.

"He may have a dozen. I know of three."

"All near his office?"

"Two of them quite distant."

"Who inhabits them?"

"I cannot tell you. Though I have been his slave for years, there are secrets which I have never discovered."

"I'd like to ask a question here," said Morte, and the young man looked at him again.

"Did you ever touch a steel vise in the little room above the Demon Doctor's office?"

In an instant a smile overspread Danton's face.

"I know what it is," said he. "What, have you touched it?"

"Haven't I?" cried the Man from San Lopez.

"I have felt its deadly shock in all my nerves. I was dying by inches there when fortune guided that man to the den."

"The house is full of the mysterious and marvelous," said Danton. "Doctor Jallien has devoted a life to the strange."

"I should think so, and I have devoted mine to getting even with him."

For some time longer the three talked in the detective's room, when Danton went off.

"We have nothing to fear from the Demon Doctor's spy now," remarked the detective.

"He has broken from the power that has held him so long in thrall. I am going now."

"To run down the clew he gave you?"

"Yes."

Meantime Danton had reached the street and the sunlight, and was hurrying along. A cloud had been lifted from his soul; he had been pardoned by the man he had followed with the dagger, and there was just ahead a new life for him.

"I believe I can win Mazie now," he said to himself. "The girl never liked me because I was a spy; but at no time I think she hated me. There are hiding-places in this city, scores of them. With the coils tightening about Doctor Jallien and the woman he is serving, I ought to be able to hide till the blow falls. Then I can come out and begin life over. This keen detective will hunt them down—he will find the missing child of the millionaire; he will give Morte a chance to get even with the woman who wrecked his mine, and the mystery of the death of the man called Quicksilver Dan will be solved. I must hide till the drop falls. It won't be long, and when it falls the guilty will be crushed."

Danton passed on without thinking that he was watched by a pair of eyes whose track of vision he had suddenly crossed.

The young man turned into a certain street, and soon found himself amid the throng on Broadway. The sun shone bright though cold, and he brushed a thousand people within a square.

All at once he felt some one jostle him, and at the same time something pricked him like the point of a needle.

He tried to make out the person who had touched him, but he could not. Suddenly his eyes seemed to fail, a faintness overcame him,

and the crowd became a confused mass of undistinguishable beings.

Danton was pushed to the wall of a building, with his brain in a whirl. Everything grew dark. He tried to recover himself, but it seemed that he was sinking through the sidewalk.

He heard a woman shriek and saw a rushing figure; then he was grasped by powerful hands and borne he knew not whither, for everything had grown black and his senses swam.

The truth is, Danton had succumbed to some powerful agent just when life had opened so bright for him. The sharp pain in the arm had been followed by these terrible precursors of death, and he lay on the sidewalk with a crowd around him until the patrol should come after him.

By and by the young man seemed to come back to life. He opened his eyes and beheld looking down upon him the face from which he had just fled.

There was no mistaking the eyes that burned with triumph in the head of the man he first saw after coming up out of the land of darkness. They were fixed upon him with all the intensity of a leering fiend's; they danced above him like little dervishes, and Danton covering the face with his finger, cried loudly:

"That is the man! That is the Demon Doctor of New York!"

The crowd looked at the man with the strange eyes and some laughed.

"That is the man who has killed me, I say," continued Danton. "I have been in his power for years, but I was escaping from it when he overtook me. What—are—you—going to—let—him—escape?"

The youth felt his senses leaving him once more; but just then he caught sight of another face. It was near the Demon Doctor's, but it had another look.

"Ah, he has found me," cried Danton turning to this new person. "He is here! The Demon Doctor—"

A hand seemed to smother him; he made another effort to speak but failed, and as the face of Doctor Jallien vanished Danton swooned and the strong arms of the patrol lifted him from the pave and he was borne off.

Sol Sphinx who had just come up and to whom the young man's last words were addressed, turned to look, not at the inanimate body of the Demon Doctor's victim, but for the man himself.

But he found him not. He saw the crowd disperse, noticed the several people who went their ways, and though convinced that Claude Jallien had been there, he could see no one who looked like him. The wagon rattled off with Danton in it, and Sol looked after it a moment and saw it turn the nearest corner and vanish.

"This cool monster has been here," thought he. "I was near him, but I came too late to see him. I have been seen myself, perhaps. I may be watched even now, but this shall not turn me from my play."

He was watched even then, just as he feared. Not far off stood a man who did not look at all like the Demon Doctor, but who was that person all the same, and his black eyes were fixed upon the detective of the metropolis.

"What will be his next move?" Dr. Jallien asked himself. "If he forces another meeting let him beware!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

MOTHER AND CHILD.

GLIDING from light to shadow, and from shadow again into the light, turning from one street into another, and keeping her face carefully concealed, a woman was making her way rapidly over the stones of New York.

She had not come far on foot; but had left a carriage at a certain corner, with a whispered order to the coachman, who was waiting for her where he had seen her last.

It was night, and the wind that came up the bay was flaring the jets in the lamps and making more shadows for the gliding woman.

In the course of time she entered a house on a street where there seemed to be a scarcity of lights, and the door was shut behind her.

There she crossed a room and opened a door which, when shut again, was not to be seen by the sharpest of eyes. She found a flight of steps which led into the ground, as it were, and in a little time she stood in a four-walled room, the walls of which were of stone and apparently unbroken from top to bottom.

A match flaring up showed that the woman still kept her face concealed, but when she had touched the match to a burner which protruded from one of the walls, she threw back her veil and stood revealed.

It was Estelle Newport—Medea of the Mines!

All at once some writing on one of the sides of the underground room caught her eye, and she walked over to it and read it with a singular smile.

It was nothing more or less than the sentences which we have seen the Man from San Lopez write in reply to the words he had witnessed drop from the jeweled hand, and Medea had come to the miner's prison.

With the eye of a lynx she went round the place inspecting the wall and looking at the seams through which the water had sped almost to the Arizonian's destruction. Of course the aperture through which Morte had dragged himself to unexpected liberty did not escape her eye.

"The next prisoner this dungeon holds will not get out," she said aloud. "It will hold him till the Day of Judgment. I will have this place fixed up right away, for he is liable to inhabit this prison at any time."

She took another survey of the place and then went back and appeared in the room above.

"The cage is ready for the bird," she smiled. "Bird? No, for the tiger!"

Estelle emerged from the house and once more threaded the streets, moving like a ghost as she kept in the shadows of the tall buildings—she, the wife of the millionaire of the avenue.

Suddenly a figure crossed her pathway, and she drew back with a light cry and hugged the wall of the nearest house.

"He is abroad, too, is he?" she said. "I wonder what devilry he is hatching now? What did he say when I robbed him of the ring?—that my triumph should prove my ruin? Was that the threat, doctor? Beware! it may prove your own."

The woman was once more the woman of the camps, the darling Queen of San Lopez, and the figure she had marked had a leopardess at his heels. She did not lose sight of him for a single moment, but tracked him to a house which she saw him enter with a pass-key, and when he had vanished, she drew back and watched. By and by he came out and went off, and then the watcher executed another move, not after him, but toward the building.

"Is she in there?" she breathed. "Did he just come away from her? I know he has found her, and that he is keeping the secret of her retreat from me. She is there. Now, all the cunning powers he owns shall not separate me from the creature who has stood in my path so long."

She found the house dark, and apparently uninhabited. The shutters were closely drawn, and all was quiet about the premises, but this only encouraged the beautiful leopardess without.

In a little while the same dark figure which had flitted down the street appeared in the cramped backyard of the building, and with the cunning of a female burglar, she entered the lower room and stood breathing hard in the dark.

She found a stairway by groping, and went up to a door which yielded to her hand. In another minute she was in another room, and then heard the slight noise of a chair rocking beyond the door to which she had crept.

"I have found his child at last!" she said. "I have re-discovered the runaway, and if I don't take advantage of this good fortune, I deserve to lose the whole game."

She listened at the door, and then with stealth lifted the latch. The room ahead was not quite dark. A lamp turned very low burned on a shadowy-looking table, and the keen eyes of the woman noticed some one rocking gently in the shadows of the room.

She crossed the carpet toward that person; she advanced, step by step until she stood near the chair, and had but to lean forward and touch its occupant.

Estelle Newport stopped and glared at the one totally unconscious of her presence.

"I have it all my own way now," she said. "No one has seen me enter this house, and I can quit it in the same manner. He might give her the antidote to get even with me; he might save the creature he has been destroying. No, he shall never do that!"

The next moment she put out her hand, and it dropped on the shoulder before her. In an instant there was a slight scream, the chair stood still, and the woman saw a white face turned to her.

"You did not look for me, did you?" she cried, not relinquishing her grip. "You thought you were safe here from me, though under the doctor's hand. Let me see how you look," and Medea dragged the shrinking creature from the chair and, still holding her, turned up the light.

In another second the face of the millionaire's wife underwent a startling change.

The person in her clutches was not Pearl, but another.

"In God's name, who are you?" cried the woman's prisoner. "Why have you invaded this house?"

There was a sudden laugh.

"And who are you?" exclaimed Estelle. "I did not know you were here. I thought—well, no matter what I thought."

She was gazing into the dark and handsome face of the person her talons had caught. There was a singular resemblance between the two women. Did Estelle see it?

"Who are you, I say?" she demanded.

"I am Kate."

"Kate who? That is no answer."

"I am Kate Ravelin."

"Not the girl who can trace people in a trance?"

"I once possessed that power."

"But you have lost it, eh?"

"I have nearly lost it all."

"But don't you think you could trace some one for me?"

"I cannot."

Estelle looked sharply at the girl.

"Beware! You don't know who I am. I am all-powerful."

"More so than the Demon Doctor?"

The woman of camp and city started.

"What do you know about him?" she cried.

"I wish I knew nothing."

"He has been here lately? Don't spin a falsehood, girl."

"He was here awhile ago."

"I thought so. I saw him leave the house."

"And you came in to see me?"

"No, not you."

Kate made no reply. She seemed to divine that she was in the grip of a dangerous creature, but so beautiful and well-formed!

"Girl, you haven't answered me close enough. You call yourself Kate Ravelin."

"It is all the name I know except that of Madam Scylla, which I use in my art."

"Who were your parents?"

"That is one of the secrets of the past."

"Don't you remember them?"

"I have a faint recollection of a woman's face and of wild plains of cacti that seemed to stretch to the distant horizon."

How Estelle Newport looked at her prisoner now! How she drew back and stared her in the face, all the time shivering as if a chill had found its way to her heart.

"Did you ever possess a ring?" suddenly asked the woman.

"Have you that ring?" was the quick response. "Indeed, I did own one once."

Estelle now dropped the arm she had clutched until then and drew from her bosom a ring which she held up to the girl.

"That is it!" cried Kate, reaching out her hand. "That is the bauble I have possessed so long."

"Where did you get it?"

"It has a history which is as old as my own; that is all I can say, for the ring has been a part of my existence."

"Then, you don't know how it became yours?"

"As I live, I do not!"

Once more the girl reached for the ring, but it was withdrawn as before, and the hand of Estelle seemed to tremble.

"You are right. You have seen the cactus plains in reality," she said. "You have seen them in their loneliness; you have played with the snakes that bask in the sunlight there; you have seen the vultures that soar above the wastes; you have even slept in the sand where the lizards crawl."

"Heavens, then you know who I am?"

There was no reply.

"You must know. You cannot tell me these things without knowing. Did you come hither to break the mystery of my life and tell me who my mother was?"

"No, a thousand times no!" cried Estelle. "Tell you who she was? I would not disclose this secret for the world. Girl, you are never to have that mystery solved."

"Then—"

Was it the flash leaping up that moment in Estelle's eyes that broke Kate's sentence?

"If I had strength—if I was my old self, before I fell under the malign influence of the Demon Doctor, you should tell me this," she said, looking fearlessly into Estelle's face. "You should tell me all about my past, or you should not quit this room alive."

Medea laughed at this.

"You would force the secret from me, would you?"

"I surely would."

"Then, girl, you will never force it from any one. I am glad I found you here instead of the other one. I know your beginning. I know who gave you the ring you have lost and which I have found. I know all about your life among the cacti; you were a babe then. You were a beautiful child, but I curse the blood that is in your veins!"

"Perhaps I would do the same if I knew whose it was!"

"You might."

Estelle now forced Kate back to the chair in which she had found her and leaned forward, looking her full in the face.

"Does the loss of your strange talent hurt you?" she demanded.

"It has drained my vitality. I am on the borders of the unseen world."

"Why haven't you traced yourself from the cradle?"

"I could not go back that far. The trail was too old."

"Did you ever try?"

"A thousand times."

"And always failed?"

"I always failed."

Once more a smile came to the face of the millionaire's wife.

"But you know me. You know all I want to know," cried Kate. "You have the very secret

I have yearned for. There seems to be but one person who could know so much."

The woman with the leopard beauty darted toward the occupant of the chair.

"What's that?" she cried, with her white hands clinched.

"I say that the woman who knows all this must be but one person. She can be no other. What are you glaring at me that way for?"

"Go on! You haven't finished. I know you haven't. Whom do you think I am?"

"God help me, but you must be my mother!"

The effect was startling. The tall figure of Estelle fell back as if a serpent, fanged and flashing-eyed, had sprung from the chair. She stood erect for a moment looking at the startled girl in the seat, then, with a cry which she could not resist, she staggered toward the table, dropping something long and shining which had lain along her arm.

"Girl, you have found her at last," she cried.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DEMON CHAIR.

THE knife glittering on the floor and before her eyes roused the beautiful fortune-teller, and she realized the full intention of the leopardess who had stolen upon her.

In another instant it was in Kate Ravelin's grip, and she stood in front of the guilty creature who had just proclaimed her parentage.

"You are my mother, yet you came hither to kill me," she cried.

"No, no, not you!"

"Why this dagger? Why this blade which fell from your hand?"

There was no answer.

"You must speak," continued Kate. "You must tell me the truth which has been concealed so long."

"I dare not! Stand aside, girl!"

She came forward with the flash of a pythoness in her eyes, and, despite the dagger that menaced her, swept the hand of the seeress aside and strode from the room. Not until the door had shut upon her mother's form did Kate Ravelin realize who had escaped from her hands. She sprung to the door and threw it wide open, but too late. Estelle was gone, and the echo of her feet as she stumbled down the dark stair was all the sound she heard.

"Gone, gone forever!" cried the girl, falling back and throwing the dagger across the room. "She has told me just enough to torture me the rest of my days. Oh! Merciful Heaven! I am on the verge of a secret, and yet it is withheld."

She fell across the chair and lay there. The wife of the millionaire did not steal back to see what her conduct had wrought, but went on out of the house and passed away among the shadows.

She was not followed. Probably if Kate had had sufficient strength she might have had a trailer at her heels; but the little lamp that gave light to the room shone upon a silent figure on the chair and that figure the young fortune-teller's.

Mrs. Newport went back to the carriage she had left at the corner, sprung inside and was driven off.

In the darkness that prevailed among the curtains of the vehicle she sat and moved not. When the carriage halted in front of her home she got out and was soon inside.

"The one long hidden secret of my life is out," said she. "He intends to keep his word—to make my triumph my ruin. But have I played for this? No."

By and by the last light seen in the Newport mansion went out, and the elegant home was wrapped in darkness.

No one was seen to quit the house; but when the new day came the maid who went up to her mistress's room to receive her orders found it empty. The bed had not been slept in; the secretaire had been left open and the frightened girl retreated with a fear at her heart.

After awhile she slipped from the mansion and after a brisk walk of some minutes reached Dr. Jallien's office. She knew that the Demon Doctor was her mistress's closest friend and medical adviser, and her first thought was of him.

She found Dr. Jallien just sitting down to his coffee, and by her white face startled him.

"Not at home?" said the Demon Doctor, a secret smile playing with his lips.

"The bed was not slept in last night."

"All that I can advise is to go home and wait till she comes," and he turned again to his breakfast so coolly that the maid stared in a manner he never forgot.

"I did not think to frighten her off so soon," said he when he found himself alone.

He was taking his third cup when the bell rung and he went to the door in person.

"What is it?" he asked, looking into the face of the man who presented himself.

Without reply the caller pushed into the hallway and the next instant flew at the doctor's throat with the fury of a wild beast and pinned him against the wall.

"This is worse than a steel vise," he cried, sinking his fingers into the flesh beneath them. "I want to show you that Morte of San Lopez is going to get even of his own accord before the detective plays his trump."

The dark eyes of the Demon Doctor nearly bulged from his head. He grew black in the face and gasped for air.

"Tell me the truth now," cried Morte as fierce as ever. "What did you do with Quicksilver Dan anyhow?"

There was no answer.

"You killed him for his wife. It was a game between you two. I am going to hold you here till you confess. I may not be a good detective, but I'm the better tiger."

The doctor struggled for air. The demon hands of Morte were fast extinguishing the life that throbbed at his heart. In a few moments he would be beyond human help despite his magic. He made a sign with his hand which the miner seemed to understand. In another minute he was released.

Dr. Jallien sunk into the nearest chair and the Man from San Lopez stood over him.

"We've got to watch tigers like you," he grinned. "Yes, and tigresses, too."

For some time the man of power sat breathless in the chair and when he raised his eyes to his persecutor he saw that he was within arm's reach.

"What was it you wanted to know?" he asked.

"I want the mystery connected with Dan's death and disappearance solved."

"Dan? Yes, yes. You have choked me to the verge of the grave."

"Curse me if I'm sorry that I have," was the response. "Tell me all now."

The Demon Doctor smiled but grimly.

"A chair first," said he, pushing toward Morte a chair which stood near. "It's a long story and you don't want to lose one word of a dying man."

The Man from San Lopez dropped into the chair, but the next instant he started up but not out of the seat.

Some infernal power held him fast!

"This time it is not the steel vise, but the demon chair," grinned Dr. Jallien.

Morte tried to quit the seat but found that he could not. His limbs seemed to stiffen under the influence of the power that held him in thrall.

"Your pard, Dan, is dead," said the doctor. "He went out of the world in a hurry without time to write his will, though he had had time enough for that long before."

The Man from San Lopez heard but could not speak, and a thousand needles were pricking his feet.

It was to be a death a thousand times worse than that promised by the vise.

All at once the handsome face of the Demon Doctor seemed to change. The glaring eyes gave it another look, and by and by it moved away.

"This time the detective will not come to the rescue," said the man. "Good-by, Morte of San Lopez. I am going out."

The eyes of the Arizonian followed him; they could do no more; he heard the door open and shut and knew that he was alone in the house of the Demon Doctor.

As for Dr. Jallien he looked none the worse for his choking now. He passed down the walk, took a car a short distance from the house and repaired to the building where he had last seen Pearl Newport, the child of the plot.

The girl even greeted him with a smile as he crossed the threshold of her room.

"What think you now?" said he.

"I am getting better," was the reply.

Dr. Jallien went to the table and she watched him manipulate several vials. When he came up to her he offered a draught which she did not refuse, and as he withdrew, casting back a smile of satisfaction, her eye followed him to the door.

"There is a change in that man," said Pearl to herself. "Some of the demonism seems to have left him. What if he intends to undo his work?"

Back to the office this time, watched by a man who kept pace with him on the opposite side of the street, went the Demon Doctor.

When he opened the door he looked at the figure sitting in the chair and was recognized.

Morte of San Lopez was still there.

"How are you now?" asked the doctor.

There was no reply.

The face of the miner had turned darker than its natural hues and while he heard, it was evident that he could not speak.

In another moment the Demon Doctor had passed on and was climbing the stairs leading to the rooms above.

By this time the man who had followed him along the street had reached the outside of the house and showed the face of Brazos Bill.

"I never got fully paid for watching Quicksilver Dan," mused the man. "He said once that I should never lack for money if I did my duty well, and didn't I?"

Brazos Bill mounted the steps and rung the

bell. If the ring was heard by the man upstairs he did not come down.

"He's in there," growled Brazos, and twisting the knob he pushed open the door and entered.

The first object he saw was the occupant of the devilish chair.

"Great heavens!" he cried falling back.

A groan fell from the lips of the tenant of the seat.

"Morte, Morte, why don't you get up?" said Bill. "In God's name—"

He did not complete the sentence for in touching Morte he had touched the chair and a shock sent him headlong against the wall.

The crash of the heavy man's fall was heard by the person overhead, and the next moment the figure of the Demon Doctor came bustling down the steps. He saw two men where he had left but one. He recognized the one who had scrambled to his feet.

"Release the man in the chair!" came over the shining barrel of a leveled six-shooter in the bronzed hand of Brazos Bill.

The Demon Doctor stood irresolute.

"Quick, or there'll be nothing left for the police photographer to take," continued the man with the weapon. "Hang me if I don't believe you've taken a contract to kill off all the citizens of San Lopez."

The determined man took a step toward the Demon Doctor, who, seeing what was in his eye, threw one hand to the wall, touched an electric button there, and quick as a flash the body of Morte fell from the chair.

With one hand Brazos Bill dragged the body toward him, and with the other held the revolver in the doctor's face.

"I won't save the hangman a job," said he. "No, I wouldn't rob even a sheriff, and I never liked 'em, either. I came here on business, but we'll not discuss that now. Some other time, doctor; but I want my pay for the work I did, watching him for you and the tigress of the avenue; and that pay will come when I ask for it."

The hand of Bill now pulled the inanimate form of the Man from San Lopez into the air, where he partially revived, but he supported him down the street, till he could sight a cab, into which he plunged with his charge.

Those who saw him with Morte wondered what had happened, but Bill, with clinched teeth, did not enlighten them, and not until he was in the cab with his old pard did he put up the six-shooter into which the Demon Doctor had just looked.

"It's not San Lopez," grinned Bill, "but it's nearly as excitin'. I guess I won't go West ag'in."

CHAPTER XXXI.

OUT OF THE SHADOW.

It was twenty-four hours after these exciting events and the detective of Gotham sat in his little room deeply puzzled. Not only had he failed to find a clue to Pearl Newport's whereabouts, but the Demon Doctor had disappeared.

The house so long famous as the home of a man skilled in the mysteries of medicine was closed, and the room which had witnessed so much gave forth no trace of the master. If the ground had opened and swallowed Doctor Jallien he could not have vanished more completely, and not a trace of him had he left behind.

Perhaps the rescue of Morte from the demon chair by Brazos Bill had helped him off, but he was gone, and that was the end of it.

Another night was at hand, and the detective was about to quit the room when footsteps came up-stairs and a face looked timidly into his quarters.

It was drawing back when Sol sprung up, and the next moment he had in his clutch the figure of his little acquaintance of the old rookery—Billy Bee.

The little gamin was dragged into the office and held fast.

"You came to see me, eh?" said Sol, recalling his attempt to extract information from the boy and its signal failure.

"I was jest lookin' round," was the answer. "I thought mebbe Bill might be here."

"You want Bill, do you?"

"If I didn't would I be nosin' 'round for 'im?"

Seeing that he was not released the boy became more tractable, and looking up into Sol's face asked with a grin:

"How ar' ye gettin' along now?"

"Pretty well, Billy."

"Did you ever find the lady what give me the letter for the tall gent—Bill's old pardner?"

"I know all about her."

"If you know all you're a good one. I fancy that Bill knows the same from what he's let drop at different times."

"When did you see her last?"

"I ran ag'in her as I was comin' up here."

The detective started.

"She was down on Broadway looking at a man who was walking along with his collar up 'round his chin. At first I thought she was watchin' you, and I follered 'em for a square, but when I came to see straight I found she was keepin' close to the doctor."

Had the tigress turned upon her mate in

crime? Had Medea thrown herself upon the track of the Demon Doctor?

"You made no mistake, boy?" cried Sol.

"What's my eyes for but to see?" was the reply. "Don't I know the man who looks like a dude but who knows that he ain't no dude at the same time?"

"And she was tracking him, was she?"

"Yes."

That was quite enough to take the detective from the little office, and telling Billy Bee that Brazos Bill had not shown himself for ten hours, he went below and was soon on Broadway under the flare of its thousand and one lights.

His chances for finding either the Demon Doctor or his tracker were very poor, but he kept his eyes on the alert. An hour later he saw a man turn into Broadway and walk rapidly toward the Battery. He, too, had his collar turned up in the manner briefly described by Billy Bee, and for the detective to see him was to follow.

If the man was Dr. Jallien, would he lead him to Pearl Newport, or even to Kate Ravelin, the missing fortune-teller?

The longer Sol followed the man the stronger grew his convictions that his quarry was the man he had lost. He had the walk of the Demon Doctor, and he kept him in sight up one street and down another, until he turned suddenly toward a small house and entered with a night-key.

The door shutting behind the ferret only increased his desire to follow the man beyond the threshold. Which one was there—Kate or Pearl?

The man so persistently tracked by Sol Sphinx was the Demon Doctor, as the light beyond the door proved when he stood there with his hat thrown up so as to reveal his face.

He stood looking at a young girl who sat in the depths of a reclining chair watching him with a strange smile of curiosity at her mouth.

After a while the man came toward her and instead of greeting him pleasantly, the girl shrunk back, for in his eyes was a gleam she did not like. This time it seemed to her, he did not bring health to the house.

"You are getting along finely," said Dr. Jallien. "At this rate you will soon quit this place and surprise them all."

"Why not now?" asked Pearl.

"The time has not come for that," was the reply. "We must wait a while longer."

"Do they hunt me still?"

"Yes, but that detective can find nothing and yet they call him good."

The patient sighed.

"And she—my step-mother?"

A sudden flash broke out in the Demon Doctor's eyes.

"Oh, she's vanished from the game."

"Mrs. Newport?" cried the girl.

"Yes. She is not in it any longer."

"Dead?"

"Not yet, but she might as well be."

Dr. Jallien drew back a pace and sat down at the table where he had sat before.

Pearl saw him take from an inner pocket a little case from which he lifted a tiny vial, not two as before, and then came toward her. Somehow or other she shrunk from the potion. The others had benefited her—they had infused new strength throughout her body—but something seemed to tell her that in the dose now at hand there was death, not life.

"You don't want to get well, do you?" said the Demon Doctor.

"I do. I want to go back to those I love with my old-time strength, but—"

"Then why refuse that which carries health with it?"

She did not speak.

"If you would not, you shall," cried the doctor. "I am master here and you are still my patient."

One hand descended upon Pearl's shoulder and the bottle came down toward her lips.

"Not that potion, but the other one," moaned the helpless girl. "I know there has been a change in my medicine. Your eyes betray you. You have gone back to the deadly drugs."

"Girl, I have. The detective shall never find you, or, if he does, he will have cause for cursing the Demon Doctor of New York."

Pearl felt the soft fingers of the man of crimes sink into her flesh and saw the blazing eyes that were above her. There was death in their depths.

At this juncture a sound which seemed to startle the man was heard by the almost fainting child of the plot. It was the click of a latch somewhere behind her chair.

The next moment there leaped into the room the figure of a man at sight of whom the Demon Doctor fell back and then stood his ground in the center of the room.

Sol Sphinx had arrived! The detective of Gotham, the man who had tracked the doctor to the house of the hidden patient, had reached the scene in the nick of time and now stood face to face with the fiend of New York.

If he would secure the man he had hunted no time was to be lost. Sol thought of the young man he had seen on the sidewalk, and wondered

if the Demon Doctor was still armed with the destructive agent which had felled Danton, his spy.

All at once across the space which separated them went the ferret of Gotham. He was met with outstretched arms by the man who faced him, and Pearl saw both go to the wall behind the doctor; then everything became blank to her.

When she came back to life she was not in the arm-chair but in another room and upon a couch, and the face bending over her was that of Doctor Spray, Marcell's friend.

For some time Pearl looked up in silence, fearing to speak, but when she did her first words were of Sol the detective.

"He lost his man," said Dr. Spray. "But go to sleep now and you will be told all when you waken," and with a smile of resignation the millionaire's child turned her face from the doctor and fell into a deep slumber.

Yes, Sol Sphinx had lost his prey. With the strength of a tiger and the slipperiness of the eel, the Demon Doctor of New York had eluded him, and after a desperate struggle at the wall, had thrown him off and bounded from the room. Sol, when he recovered, found that Pearl was still an occupant of the chair and that he had not suffered much at the doctor's hands; but it was too late to follow the man of mysteries, and he saw that the old house did not hold Pearl any longer.

"We have lost him now, forever," said a man who stood in the detective's room and looked down into Sol's face.

"Do you think so, Morte?"

"Doctor Jallien will never give us another chance, and I won't get to pay him back for the steel vise and the demon chair."

"You might have lost that opportunity if I had held him."

"No. I would have paid him back in spite of the law."

"How?"

"Never mind that, Captain Sol. I feel in my body, and always will, the effects of his two efforts to rob the world of one of the distinguished citizens of San Lopez," grinned Morte. "Don't I want to meet him?"

"Really, wouldn't you sooner run across the woman of camp and avenue?"

"Queen Medea?"

"Estelle, as we call her."

"I would like to see her," and the eyes of the Man from San Lopez got a quick flash. "I would like to settle forever the old grudge that brought me across the continent; but my opinion is that we have seen the last of this tigress who ensnared the nabob."

Sol said nothing. He, too, believed that Estelle Newport had vanished for good, but he would not say as much. A detective never likes to admit that a woman has outwitted him.

"If I don't see her, I can frame this as a memento of my experience in New York," laughed Morte, taking from his bosom and unfolding to Sol's gaze a bit of dingy paper.

It was the marriage certificate which would have unmasked beautiful Estelle Newport; but which her eyes were never to see again.

"By the way, you have found Pearl; but there's another one missing."

"Kate?"

"The girl who can track people in a trance." "Kate is lost, but she will not remain so," said the detective, with positiveness.

"I want her rescued. I want to tell her that she will always have a friend in Morte of Arizona. I have no heir, and what I've got must go somewhere. Sol Sphinx, you must find Kate, the fortune-teller."

"I hear you, Morte. The girl shall be found, and the truth about that letter which she left in her room shall be known, though it is no longer much of a mystery to me."

"What do you think?"

"She penned it under the Demon Doctor's spell."

Half an hour later the Ferret Detective might have been seen in another part of the city.

He was not alone, but at his side walked a boy who, despite a suit of good clothes looked like Billy Bee.

"I lost 'im somewhar here last night," the boy was saying. "You see he is as slippery as a Hackensack eel and he gets away when you're not looking for such a thing."

"I know that from experience, Billy."

"Now that looks like the house," replied the boy, designating one of several which looked alike. "It was after dark you see and he vanished right about here."

Sol Sphinx walked toward the house and rung the bell.

The woman who came to the door met him with a smile and a bow.

The detective told her that he was looking for a friend, a Mr. Jallien, who lived somewhere in the neighborhood.

"A tall, handsome man?" queried the woman.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Such a man comes sometimes to the house next door," was the reply and Sol Sphinx fell back and saw the door shut in his face.

The next door! Had he found the hiding-place of Kate, the mind-reader?

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SECRET OF THE DUNGEON.

In a little room sat a young woman with a pallid face.

She was alone and her hands were holding a beautiful dagger, at which she was gazing with intense curiosity. There were marks of deep trouble on the face displayed in the dim light, and but little of Kate Ravelin's strange beauty remained.

She had not forgotten the exciting visit from the woman who had confessed her parentage, and the dagger she held was the one which had fallen from that woman's hand.

She was staring at the blade which had been intended for Pearl's heart by the creature who had brought it thither, when a door near her opened, and she saw standing on the threshold the figure of Dr. Jallien.

In an instant the dagger was concealed, and Kate turned to greet the terror of her existence.

The Demon Doctor crossed the carpet with the tread of a cat, and the smile that wreathed his lips seemed to fascinate the occupant of the chair.

"You must track for me," said Dr. Jallien. "For the last time, girl. I swear that you shall never be put to the test again."

"For the last time? I am glad of that. I am so tired of this life! I want to go back to something better."

"You shall if you find the trail for me."

Kate fell back in the depths of her chair and held out her hand. The touch of Dr. Jallien's fingers seemed to thrill her, and she shrunk from the contact.

In eager voice the Demon Doctor described Mrs. Newport, and then waited for Kate to speak.

"I can see nothing," said she. "All is a dark mist before my eyes. I try to pierce it, but I fail."

"But you must not fail! Remember, this is the last trail."

"I cannot see the woman, though it seems that something is moving in the mist."

The Demon Doctor waited a while longer, but the girl could go no further. Her powers seemed to have left her; she struggled to recover the lost force, but vainly.

"I am done. I can see no one."

"Not even the lights of the city?"

"I seem to be on the street, but the lights dance and confuse me."

"I believe you have lost the talent at last," said he.

There was no answer.

"It has been the curse of my life," replied Kate, now herself again. "I would not summon it back if I could."

The dark eyes of the magnetizer were fixed upon her.

"Then I must hunt another who can track for me," said he, falling back.

"But first tell me who came to this house and confessed that she was my mother."

The Demon Doctor bent forward, a wild eager gleam in her eye.

"Did she confess to you?" he cried.

"She did and with a dagger in her hand."

"Then, why didn't she kill you?"

"I cannot say. She fled with the confession on her lips and I heard the door shut behind her."

"Girl, you need not know the end of the secret. Live on and forget that you have looked into the eyes of the woman who bore you."

"But, I would know!" persisted Kate. "You know and you must tell me."

"Must?" smiled Dr. Jallien.

She stood before him now, the dagger left by Estelle Newport lying along her arm.

"I will not imbibit your life," declared the Demon Doctor. "You would thank me for silence. I will not tell you, girl."

He backed toward the door, and not until then caught sight of the bit of steel in the fortune-teller's hand.

"That dagger has no terrors for a man like me," he laughed. "You are out of my care at last. Go forth and find your mother!"

He touched the door as he spoke, and, in a moment, had vanished.

"Gone and with the secret of my birth in his heart!" cried the girl. "I will obey him. I will go forth this night and find the woman he bade me seek. I will hunt her down and stand before her once more—before my mother!"

"What! is he coming back?" she cried a moment later. "Has he changed his mind, and is he coming to tell me the truth?"

She watched the door like a hawk and saw it open.

"You will tell me, will you?" she cried.

"You will reveal the past and—"

She checked her eagerness and fell back for the man before her was not the Demon Doctor, but Sol Sphinx, the Ferret Detective.

"You must have missed the serpent. He was here; but has gone!" she exclaimed, clutching the wary detective's arm.

"Doctor Jallien?"

"Yes, the Demon himself!"

Sol was chagrined. He had again missed

the man of mysteries, and Kate, seeing his look, said:

"But you have found me, and that is something, Sol."

"It is much, and to think that I have hunted for you in the river."

"Why there?"

"The message you left for me."

"I left no message. Doctor Jallien came for me and under the spell of those terrible eyes I went off with him."

The detective showed the astonished girl the message he had found in her house, and her gaze was long.

"That must have been the work of his brain, but I wrote it," she admitted, looking up into his face.

"Just what I told the Man from San Lopez."

The city clocks were pointing to near the hour of midnight when a man came down the steps of a certain house not far from the East River and moved off rapidly.

As he turned a corner near by, he was spied by a person who came from the opposite direction, and the first had a trailer at his heels.

"If I lose him now I lose him forever," said the one in the rear. "If I let the Demon get away, I will leave the profession and go West with Morte when he returns."

Square after square was passed by the two, and at last, the man behind slipping forward, reached the other's side before he became aware of his presence.

"Gods! You?" he cried, looking over his shoulder and into the Ferret Detective's face.

"Why not?" was the answer. "Why shouldn't it be I?"

There was no reply, for Dr. Jallien had stopped, and was gazing into the eyes that regarded him warily.

"I like a hunter like you," he observed at length. "You are worthy of my steel."

The hand of the detective fell upon the Demon Doctor's shoulder. It was not shaken off.

"Which way is it?" quietly asked Dr. Jallien.

Sol Sphinx, surprised at the non-resistance of his prisoner, led him away and hailed a cab.

"Is it to the station at last?"

"Yes."

Away over the stones rattled the cab containing the detective and his man. The interior of the vehicle was dark, and while Sol could not see his prisoner he could hear his ready tongue.

Dr. Jallien was in good mood. He laughed over the game he had played, talked about the scene in his laboratory when he had Sol in his power; but, all at once he grew still.

"He thinks he is telling too much," thought Sol, and waited for the cab to stop.

When it did so he opened the door and turned to the doctor.

"We are here!" he announced.

There was neither movement nor speech on the part of the man in the cab.

Sol Sphinx leaned forward and seized his prisoner's arm.

"Heavens!" he cried. "The devil has cheated me, after all!"

A brief inspection told the story. The pallid though smiling face of the Demon Doctor looked ghastly in the light, but those who stared and suspected saw that all was over: Dr. Jallien was dead, and at his feet, in the bottom of the cab, lay a tiny vial, which emitted a strange smell.

They carried the body into the station and laid it where the gaslight fell.

"He cheated me as well as Sol," said a man who soon came in. "The man of the steel vise and the demon chair will plot no more!" and Morte of San Lopez turned and walked out.

And now began the Ferret Detective's last trail.

He hunted high and low for Queen Medea. She was the soul of the plot—the instigator of the crime against Pearl, for whose million she had played with the help of the Demon Doctor.

A week passed, and still the mystery of her disappearance remained unsolved.

Pearl had gone home, and her father had come back from the South. He had returned to find his wife missing, and to be told, in part, the story of the thrilling events which have inspired our narrative.

A year came and went. Danton, who had recovered under the care of Dr. Spray, had married Mazie, the Demon Doctor's maid, and Kate Ravelin was back in her old home, the heiress of the Man from San Lopez.

It was the eve of Pearl's marriage to Marcell, and a boy ran up the steps of the Newport mansion with a note for Sol Sphinx, who was there. In a moment the Ferret Detective made his appearance.

"At last," said the boy, who was Billy Bee, "I have located the old house to which I took the Arizonian that time. I went into it. It has been empty a long time, but, by nosin' round, I found a door which led into a small room. All at once the floor gave way under my feet and I fell into a cellar. It was as dark as Egypt. When I struck a match to see how to get out, what do you think I saw?"

The boy paused and looked at the detective.

"Go on," commanded Sol.

"It scares me yet. There in one corner lay a woman—a woman nicely dressed; but heavens! she was dead! She had been dead a long while. Indeed, Cap'n Sol, she was a grinning skeleton, but I found a bracelet on one of the wrists, and then I knew who she had been, for I saw that same bracelet on the wrist of the lady who gave me that decoy letter."

"Take me to that house!" cried the excited Ferret Detective, and half an hour later he stood in that underground room, the same in which the Man from San Lopez had seen his doom written by the jeweled hand on a wall of stone. He struck a match and held it over the ghastly object on the floor, and the light solved, for him at least, the mystery of Queen Medea's vanishment.

There in the depths of the dark place which she had prepared for another, she had finished her career; there, with the face of her child before her—the child she had sold years and years before—she had terminated the life which had at last been unmasked by the man from the West and the Ferret Detective of Gotham.

"Let this be our secret, Billy," said Sol, turning to the boy. "The discovery we have made need darken no lives, for this creature has played her game to her own destruction."

The Ferret Detective and his young friend left the place, and that which is no mystery to them to others is a mystery still. Kate Ravelin never learned the actual truth concerning her parentage, and Parke Newport lived, till death came, in ignorance of the fate of his beautiful but wicked wife.

Morte remained in the great city awhile, and then drifted back to Arizona, Brazos Bill going out with him. The body of Quicksilver Dan was never found, for Bill did not know what became of it, and the dead lips of Medea and the Demon Doctor never revealed the dreadful secret.

Sol Sphinx still inhabits the little room watched by the strange and faithful Jilt, and Billy Bee drops in now and then, a mine of information of every sort; but, the lost spirit sight came not back to Kate, and she gladly abandoned her calling of reading the future for the thousand and one dupes, fools and cranks who fester in the metropolis as spawn and lizards in a congenial pen.

Doctor Spray never discovered the Demon Doctor's secrets, and Mrs. Harlow and little Tressy, the feather-painter, hear no more soft footsteps on the tenement stair.

Pearl is happy, and Marcell no longer dreams of the machinations of the Demon.

THE END.

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